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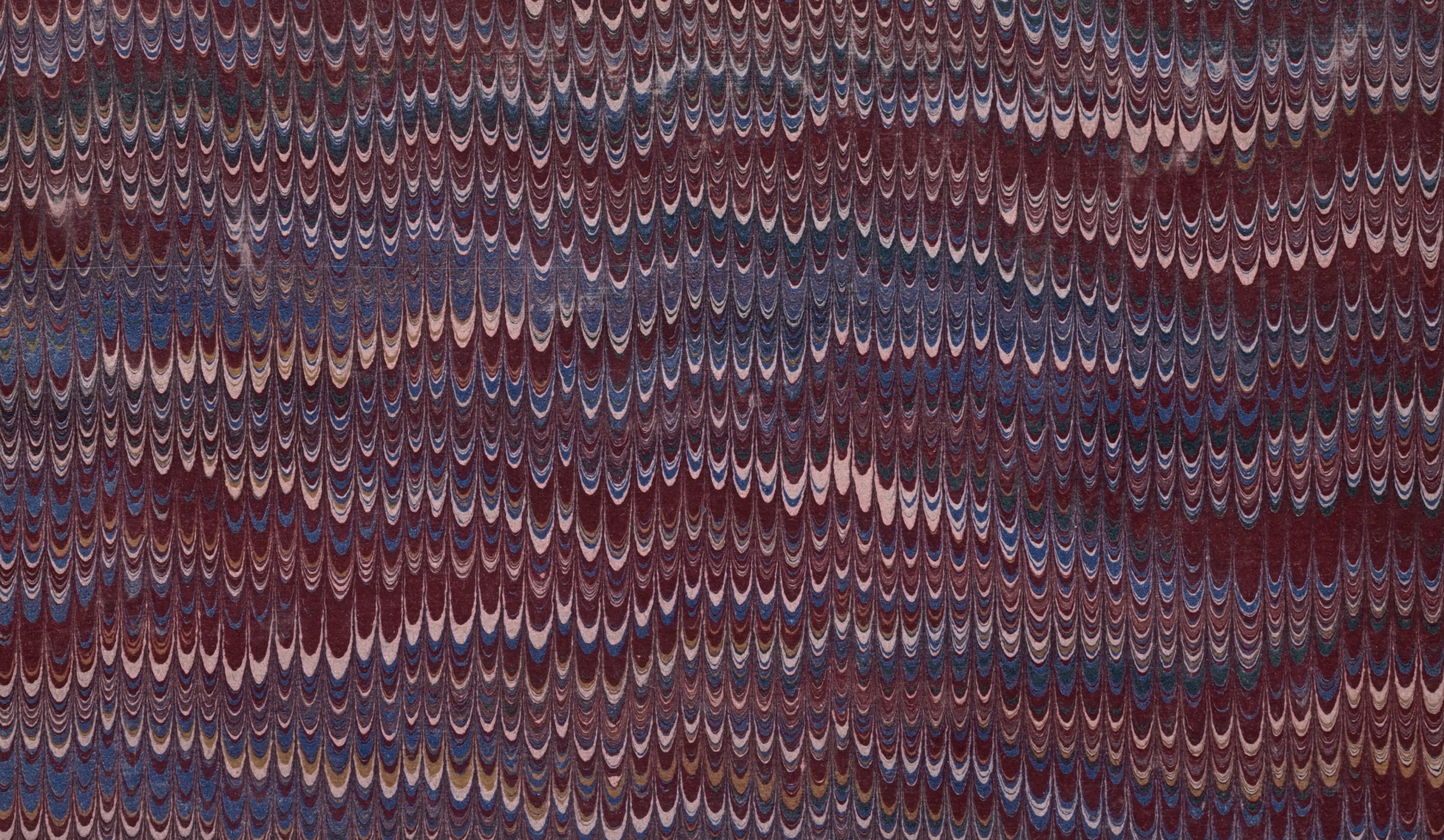

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MOUNT EDEN

BY

FLORENCE MARRYAT,

AUTHOR OF "ON CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE" "OPEN SESAME," ETC., ETC.

Frank F. Lovell & Co., Publishers,

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A ROMANCE.

BY

FLORENCE MARRYAT,

Author of "Love's Conflict," "My Own Child," "The Master Passion," "Spiders of Society," etc., etc.

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MOUNT EDEN.

CHAPTER I.

EVELYN.

SHE was not a pretty girl by any manner of means, at all events at that period of her life. Her most striking features were a large and somewhat heavy nose, and a wide mouth. But her chin was firm and well moulded, and she had a pair of large liquid eyes, set in a noble forehead. Her hair—of a reddish tinge, and of which she possessed an unusual quantity—was all pushed off her face in a most unbecoming fashion, and her plain, black dress was relieved by nothing more ornamental than a frill of common lace about the throat. Yet there was nothing ordinary about her, unless it were the look of extreme weariness with which she surveyed the scene before her. It was evening, at the close of one of the hottest days in July, and she was leaning with both elbows on the sill of her bedroom window, trying to inhale a breath of fresh air, and looking expectantly up the street as she did so. Such a bedroom as it was, too! An attic at the very top of a dingy lodging-house in a back street of Liverpool, with a sloping roof that concentrated all the sun's rays, and made it like an oven at that time of the year. Whitewashed walls that offered no relief to the wearied eye; a small iron bedstead, a strip of carpet, a common deal washstand and table—these composed the luxuries of Evelyn's sleeping apartment. In the ceiling was a trap-door that led out upon the roof of the house, and had been placed there in case of fire. Evelyn often looked at it, and wished she could get through and sit upon the house-top, and feel the air circling all around her. Once she had mounted on a chair and slipped the bolt and lifted the trap-door, but the dirt and

dust had frightened her from venturing further, and she had never tried to open it again. As she looked out of her window now, and noted the begrimed pavement, strewn with orange peel and dirty pieces of paper ; watched the women, with their filthy children, standing in clusters of three and four at the corners of the street ; listened to the vendors crying shell-fish, garden roots, and decaying fruit and vegetables, and inhaled the various smells that saluted her nostrils, she drew back into the shelter of her humble room with a sensation of disgust. She had lived amongst such scenes for years past, but she had never grown accustomed to them. Liverpool, as it presented itself to her, was the most horrible place in all the world, and she would shut her eyes sometimes and try to recall the country scenes in which she had once dwelt. It was not so very long ago, after all, since she had been there ; though sometimes, in her desolation, it seemed ages. Evelyn was seventeen years old, and half that time she had lived where she now was, till the past had faded to a misty, far-off dream. On her window-sill there stood three stunted, unhappy-looking little plants—a verbena, a scarlet geranium, and a musk. She had bought them as mere seedlings, and had carefully tended them ever since, and they had so far rewarded her care as to advance to maturity and blossom. Often, when she had a minute to spare, she would rub her fingers over the leaves of the verbena, or bury her nose in the scarlet geranium, and try and bring back some recollection of the place in which she had delighted long ago. The stream where the large blue forget-me-nots grew, and the fields laden with ripe corn, and the nut-bushes and wild briar roses that hung over the country road ; and she would long, with a feverish longing, to get away from her present surroundings, and be (if it were only a servant) in the fresh, cool country again. That is, she *would* have so longed, had it not been for one thing that bound her to Liverpool. As the remembrance of it arose, a faint color came into the girl's cheeks, and she hid her face in the musk plant and geranium, that, like herself, were struggling for existence in the close, murky air of her bedroom window.

"Evelyn!" called a shrill voice from the narrow staircase. The girl started from her reverie.

"Yes, Aunt Maria."

"Where are you? What are you doing?"

Evelyn opened the door and confronted the questioner.

"Nothing, aunt—that is, nothing in particular."

"Good gracious me!" cried Miss Rayne, "you ought to be ashamed of yourself. Here am I, toiling morning, noon and night to keep a decent home above our heads, and you can sit down and do 'nothing in particular!'"

"It is only for the moment. I have been working, too," replied Evelyn, with a quiet dignity that always made her seem older than her aunt when it came to an argument between them. "I have made the pastry for to-morrow, and I have mended all Will's shirts," pointing to a heap of linen on the bed.

"Will's shirts, indeed!" exclaimed Miss Rayne, with a sniff. "Let Will find some one else to mend his shirts."

"Oh, aunt, how can he, with the miserable salary that Uncle Caryll gives him?"

"Well, he must ask for more pay, then. When Mr. Caryll begged me, as a favor, to take the lad into my house, and board and lodge him for a pound a week, he didn't say anything about the mending of his linen. Will takes quite enough advantage of my kindness as it is. He's not my nephew, you must remember."

"No, aunt, but he's my cousin."

"Rubbish! That doesn't oblige you to turn into his factotum. You are my own brother's child, and as such I'm bound to take an interest in you; but except that your poor mother was one of them, these Carylls have no claim on me. Indeed, I often wish I had kept out of their way altogether."

"Uncle Caryll doesn't trouble us much," said Evelyn, in a low voice.

"No, my dear; that's just where it is. A man rolling in money, without kith or kin, as you may say (except this lad and yourself), and he barely keeps him, and takes no more notice of you than if you were so much dirt. Why are all his favors (such as they are) to be conferred upon William Caryll? What have you done that you should be left out? You're quite as much his flesh and blood as your cousin. His sister's daughter is as near to him any day as his brother's son. And you're a Caryll, too, all over, whilst Will takes after his mother's family."

"He hasn't done so much for Will, either," said the girl, as she folded up the shirts, preparatory to putting

them away. "He has made him a clerk in his counting-house, and gives him a pound a week for his clothes and pocket-money."

"And pays me precisely the same sum for keeping him in food and lodging. It's disgraceful!" interposed Miss Rayne excitedly; "and some one ought to tell the old man so. Particularly—if what folks say is true—and he means to leave Mount Eden to Will."

"Aunt!" cried Evelyn, dropping the shirts upon the bed again, "is that really the case?"

"Well, my dear, it was told me in confidence, so you must be sure not to repeat it; but Mr. Gamble was called in to witness your uncle's will the other day, and from a few words dropped by the lawyer, and from a few more he couldn't help seeing, he quite thinks Mr. Caryll has nominated your cousin his heir, instead of his son Hugh."

"Poor Cousin Hugh. But is it quite—quite sure, auntie, that he will never be heard of again?"

"As sure as anything can be in this world. The poor boy ran away to sea, and was drowned by the upsetting of a boat in the surf in the Bay of Callao. His body was never found again. They say the boat must have hit him on the head as it turned over. It was a terrible shock at the time for your poor uncle, but it is five years and more since it occurred. Hugh would have been three-and-twenty had he lived; but since he is gone, and we none of us can take our money away with us, it is only natural Mr. Caryll should think of those who have a claim upon him."

"I am so glad! I hope it is true," said Evelyn, with a suspicious sound in her voice like tears. "How happy it will make poor Will. And he is so fit for the position, too. He hates work. He would always be miserable as a poor man."

"Well, I've no patience with you, Evelyn," replied her aunt testily. "Instead of being angry with your uncle for his injustice to yourself, you can only think of the benefit that will accrue to your cousin. And what has he done to deserve it more than you, I should like to know?"

"Oh, he is a *man*, or he will be," said Evelyn, with her grave smile. "He will help Uncle Caryll in his business, and, I daresay, take a deal of trouble off his hands. I couldn't do that, you know; and it is only fair that Will should have his reward. And uncle is not an old man.

He is not sixty. He may live for twenty years yet. Will may have a long apprenticeship to serve before he comes into Mount Eden."

"Mount Eden, indeed," snorted Miss Rayne. "It's sickening to think of that boy coming into Mount Eden. Why, the porter's lodge would be too good for him."

"Is it such a beautiful place as all that, Aunt Maria? Have you ever been there?"

"Once—in your father's lifetime, and then only for a day. But it's the most beautiful place you ever saw, Evelyn. More like Paradise than anything else. It's rightly named. But it should have come to you (or, at the least, the half of it), and I'll maintain that to my dying day."

"To *me!* O aunt, what nonsense!" cried Evelyn, with a blush that deepened as she heard the rattle of the front door lock; "there's Will," she added, taking a step towards the stairs. But her aunt barred the way.

"Now, Evelyn," she said, "I am not going to let you lower yourself by fussing over that boy till you've done your duty. Mr. Gamble is going to the theatre to-night, and wants a nice little supper fetched against he comes home. And Miss Fletcher says she can't eat Sarah's toast, so you must make it for her yourself. I can't afford to lose my lodgers through your running about after Will Caryll."

Evelyn sighed, but made no remonstrance.

"What am I to fetch for Mr. Gamble's supper, aunt?"

"Well, I should think half a pound of Bologna sausage, and a little salad, would be about the thing; or you might get him some fish, if it's cheap to-night, and potato cakes. Mr. Gamble likes fish for his supper, I know."

"Eve!" shouted a youthful voice from the dining-room floor; "Eve, where are you? Come down and give me my tea; I'm in a hurry."

The girl made for the door.

"Now, Evelyn, remember I depend on you for Mr. Gamble's supper and Miss Fletcher's toast."

"I will attend to them both, auntie."

"And no bacon for that boy's tea, mind. He's eaten more than a pound of bacon in a couple of days. I never agreed, when I took him in for twenty shillings a week, to find him in more than bread and butter."

"But he is *so* hungry," remonstrated Evelyn, with her hand on the door.

"Let him go to his rich uncle, then, and ask for more money. It's not coming out of my pocket, I can tell you; I don't like him well enough. No bacon, mind, and no cold meat. If he wants an egg he can have it, but my means will go no further. There he is calling again. I never heard anything like it in my life. One would think the whole house belonged to him, but he isn't at Mount Eden yet, and he'll have to find that out," said Miss Rayne indignantly, as she marched off to her own room.

Evelyn dashed after her, and flew downstairs. In the back dining-room—the only apartment which their poverty permitted them to reserve for their own use—stood a young man—a lad, indeed, in years, being only twenty, but tall and upright as a dart, and handsome as a statue. His fair hair curled close to his head. He had bright, blue eyes, rather too pronounced and wide open, a delicate straight nose, with closed nostrils, a small mouth, with thin lips, a narrow jaw, and a pointed chin. Doubtless he was good looking,—unusually so,—but something in his expression deteriorated from his beauty. It lay partly in the shifting glance of the eyes, which never seemed to look one straight in the face, and partly in the weakness of the mouth, which was sufficiently open to show two very white teeth in front.

But Evelyn Rayne saw none of these defects. For the last two years she had been thrown into daily intimate communion with her cousin, Will Caryll, and, in her eyes, he was simply perfection, though she had never let any one guess that she thought so. This serious, old-fashioned, and somewhat ordinary-looking girl had a depth of feeling in her unknown to her companions, who, whilst they twisted her to their own convenience, had no idea of the thoughts that sank deep into her mind, and took root and grew there.

"I say, Eve, this is too bad!" exclaimed young Caryll, as she entered the room. "Here am I waiting for my tea, and in a deuce of a hurry to get out again, and there's not a sign of it. Where's that fool Sarah? Why hasn't she laid the cloth?"

"My dear Will, it is only just six o'clock, and you never have your tea till half-past. It shall be on the table in five minutes. Why are you in such a hurry to-night?"

"I'm going out."

Evelyn's face fell. It was evident the news was a disappointment to her.

"Oh! Then the best thing I can do is to go and help Sarah."

"Are my shirts ready?"

"Yes. I laid them on my bed. Shall you want anything more"

"Only a clean white tie. And I think there's a button off my new gloves."

"Your ties are in the left-hand drawer, and I sewed the button on your gloves last week."

"Thanks, that's a good girl. And now, do let me have my tea. And, I say, Eve, is there anything to eat in the house,—something substantial, I mean,—cold meat or bacon?"

"I will manage it," she answered cheerfully, as she left the room.

It was more of an effort than some might imagine for her to answer cheerfully at that moment. She had been looking forward all day to her cousin's return, and to a pleasant evening spent with him. For it was Saturday, and on Saturday Will Caryll received his weekly stipend, and always seemed in better spirits for it. He had not to get up so early on the following morning, either, so it did not signify how late he stayed up at night, and on Saturdays he had been used to take his cousin Evelyn for long strolls, riding on the omnibus or street tram, into the surrounding country, leaving dingy, smoky Liverpool far behind, and wandering about all the summer evening with her upon his arm.

These were the girl's happiest moments,—would prove, perhaps, to be the happiest moments of all her life,—although she was unconscious why they were so. And now, Will was going out somewhere by himself, and she must find her Saturday evening's recreation in toasting Miss Fletcher's bread, or catering for Mr. Gamble's supper. But she did not grumble, even to herself. She heaved more than one sigh as she prepared her cousin's tea-tray, but even then she felt a certain pleasure in producing coppers from her own pocket and running round the corner to buy a few shrimps to make his meal more palatable to him. And she sat down afterwards to peel them, whilst he ate, and would have asked no better fate than thus to minister to his wants for the remainder of her life.

CHAPTER II.

LOVE'S YOUNG DREAM.

WILL CARYLL was very reticent on the subject of where he was going that night. He ate his shrimps as fast as Evelyn could peel them, and chatted to her of the events of the past day, animadverting strongly on his uncle's meanness and strict *surveillance*, which prevented a fellow ever having a moment to himself.

"And he's so beastly suspicious, too," he wound up with, "that he never believes a word one says. He asked me the other day where I dined, and I told him, and I found out afterwards that he'd actually been round to the place to learn if it was true. As if a fellow would tell a lie about a stupid thing like that!"

"O Will, that is horrible!" said Evelyn, her grave eyes dilated with indignation. "I could not stand being suspected of an untruth. Didn't it make you very angry? Didn't you tell him you are too honorable and too much of a gentleman to stoop to a falsehood?"

"My dear girl, it's no good telling the old fool anything. He wouldn't believe me if I did—he's as obstinate as a mule. The only way to deal with him is to get all you can, and do as little as you need."

"Oh, but that's not right," cried Evelyn.

"Ah, well, well, you know what I mean. You must stick up for yourself if you don't want to be put upon. I plucked up courage the other day to ask the old gentleman for an increase of salary. He glared at me as if I had offered to poison him. 'A pound a week is not much pay for a fellow of my age, Uncle Roger,' said I.

"'A pound a week, sir! What do you mean?' he exclaimed. 'I pay a pound a week to Miss Rayne for your board and lodging, and that makes two pounds a week—one hundred and four pounds a year,—double what you're worth."

"I suggested he should pay the two pounds into my own

hands, and let me provide for myself, but he wouldn't hear of it. He said I shouldn't pay for my keep at all, then, and the bills would come back into his hands. Did you ever hear of such an ogre, Eve? I'm sick to death of it all. Sometimes I think I'll give him notice, and look out for a situation for myself. I'd like to see his face when I sent in my resignation."

"No, no, Will! you musn't do that," exclaimed Evelyn, remembering what her aunt had told her. "Try and be patient, there's a dear boy. Uncle Roger can do so much for you if you keep good friends. It would be folly to quarrel with him."

"Of course he must do something for me. I am quite aware of that. Since Hugh is dead, I am the next heir, and ought to come in for everything when the old man kicks. So Pitman says."

"Who is Pitman?"

"The chief clerk. I believe he knows more than he will tell me, for he's very close. But, anyway, it seems a beastly shame, if I'm to have all that money some day,—fifteen thousand a year, Pitman says, if it's a penny,—that I can't handle a little more of it now. A pound a week! Why, it hardly pays for my dinner! And I have a tailor's bill three yards long."

"Oh, Will, however will you pay it?"

"I must leave it to pay itself, Eve. There's no way out of it. And to see the piles of money that go through uncle's office every day!"

"But that has nothing to do with you, Will, no more than if it were through the office of anybody else. It isn't yours."

"I know that as well as you do, but it's a great temptation."

Evelyn looked at him wonderingly. Such a thing could never prove a temptation to *her*.

"Well, I must be off," cried Will Caryll, as he bolted the last shrimp. "Is there any hot water in my room?"

"I will fetch it for you at once," she answered, as she went downstairs.

In a few minutes he was out of the house, banging the hall door after him as if he were glad to get free.

He had good reason to keep his intentions a secret from his cousin. He knew that *she* would have reason to dis-

pute and oppose them. For he had two theatre tickets in his pocket, and he wanted to take a pretty milliner's girl (with whom he had scraped up a questionable acquaintance in the street) to the play. He was looking forward to posing as the "masher swell" to "Emily," and impressing her with a sense of his importance in the commercial world. But when he arrived at the girl's residence, he found himself doomed to disappointment. Emily had been "one too many" for him. Some other fellow, older than Will Caryll, and probably with more money in his pocket, had already made his appearance on the scene, and the faithless milliner had left the house under his protection.

Will gnashed his teeth when the truth was rudely blurted out to him. There are times in the masculine career when it seems a terrible calamity to be too young, and one's youth presses on the brain like a barrier to liberty. This was one of them. Will tried to be easy on the matter, and to turn it off as a thing of no consequence, but he lamentably failed, and no one who saw him could have mistaken what he felt. But as he turned away with a careless whistle, his cousin Evelyn came into his mind. The pretty milliner had failed him, but Eve would not do so, and there were the tickets in his pocket, burning into his very soul; it would never do to waste them. So, half-an-hour later, just as Evelyn Rayne returned home with Mr. Gamble's supper, she encountered Will Caryll on the doorstep.

"Will!" she exclaimed, with pleased surprise; "what brings you home so early?"

He could not tell the truth. He knew it would lower him in her eyes, and he was too conceited to wish to lose even the least modicum of admiration from any one of the sex. So he temporised by asking her, with one of his sunny smiles,—

"Cannot you guess?"

"Indeed, I cannot."

"I went out to buy some tickets for the theatre. I want to take you there to-night to see 'Human Nature.' Make haste and put on your things. We must start at once."

Evelyn looked confounded.

"O Will, why didn't you tell me of it before?"

Visions of tuckers she *might* have tacked in, and rib-

bons she might have ironed out, flashed on her imagination, and almost melted her to tears. She felt she was not fit to go out to a place of amusement with *him*.

"What's up now, Eve?" he demanded.

"O Will, do you think I shall look nice enough? I have not been to the theatre for years—not since Mr. Gamble took auntie and me to the pantomime at the Rotunda. I have nothing to wear but my Sunday frock. And will Aunt Maria let me go? I am half afraid she will say no!"

"Cut in and ask her, then, and don't keep me waiting all night," retorted Will. "But it will be a shame, if she refuses. Why, you never have any amusement from one week's end to another. Tell her that Uncle Roger gave me the tickets, and desired that you should use one of them."

"But did he? I thought you said you bought them?" returned Evelyn, regarding him with her grave, questioning eyes.

"So I did; but uncle gave me the money, so it comes to the same thing."

"Oh, and you said he was so mean!"

"Well, a couple of tickets for the dress circle is no great gift. But make haste and get leave, Eve, or I shall go without you."

Evelyn flew on the wings of the wind into the presence of her aunt. She was rosy with excitement, and her great eyes glowed like two stars.

"Aunt Maria, uncle has sent two tickets for the theatre for Will and me. May I go?"

"Theatre tickets, child! What theatre?"

"I don't know, but it's to see 'Human Nature.' May I go?"

"Have you got Mr. Gamble's supper?"

"Yes, yes. Such a nice little lobster. Quite fresh, and only ninepence. And a beautiful lettuce and some watercress."

"And Miss Fletcher has had her tea?"

"O aunt, half-an-hour ago, and she said the toast was delicious."

"Well, I really don't see why you shouldn't go, then, but you must come straight home afterwards. To think of Mr. Caryll sending *you* a ticket! He may be going to remember his duty to you after all. Who knows?"

Little did Evelyn Rayne care about her uncle remembering his duty to her at that moment. Her cousin filled up every crevice of her heart. The prospect of an evening spent with Will at the theatre in the present, was more attractive than the hope of any amount of revenue in the future.

"Then I *may* go?" she cried eagerly.

"Yes, if your cousin promises to take proper care of you; but don't yield to any of his persuasions, Evelyn. I haven't much faith in William Caryll. If he doesn't bring you straight home from the theatre, just jump into an omnibus and come back by yourself. Do you understand me?"

"Of course I do, auntie; but Will will bring me straight home. Oh, how good it is of you to let me go."

Her warm heart was overflowing with gratitude to every one who combined to afford her this simple pleasure. How much people lose who have the means to gratify all their inclinations. They exchange eagerness for indifference—enthusiasm for satiety—expectation for knowledge. They give up, in fact, all the zest of life for a languid trouble. Their riches have become a punishment too hard to bear.

"Auntie says I may go, Will," exclaimed Evelyn delightedly, as she rushed past him in the passage; "and I will not keep you ten minutes."

When she came downstairs again, in her best dress and hat, and a muslin *fichu* tied carelessly about her throat, Will Caryll was pleased to approve of her appearance.

"You don't look half bad when you're properly dressed, Eve," he observed, in a patronizing tone; "it's a shame Miss Rayne keeps you so shabby."

"Don't say that, Will," she answered, as they turned out of the hall door and hurried on their way. "Auntie gives me as much as she can afford, and I can't tell you how sorry I am to be a burden to her. How I wish I were a boy, and could work for myself as you do. But I have had no education to speak of. I am utterly useless, except to help to look after the house."

"That's the best thing a woman can do," said Will, "and, when you marry, you'll find the truth of it."

A crimson wave of color surged up into Evelyn's face.

"*Marry!* Oh, I never shall do that, Will. I can't. Aunt Maria has kept me ever since I was a little child. My father died, and left nothing behind him,—absolutely

nothing,—except me and his debts, and she took me in to save me from the workhouse. It will be my duty to look after her when she is old, and cannot do so for herself."

"That's rubbish—more than she has any right to expect," remarked Will laconically. "But we must look sharp, Eve, or we shall lose the first piece. Hi! hansom!"

"Here you are, sir," replied the cabman, wheeling his horse round, and drawing up beside them.

Evelyn could not believe her eyes. The most she had ever dreamt of was that her cousin would take her to the theatre in an omnibus or a tram.

"Will," she whispered, in an awestruck tone, "did you mean it? Won't it be very expensive?"

"Of course I meant it," he returned, laughing. "Do you want to walk all the way? If it's a warm night we may stroll home again, but just now time is precious. To the Grand, cabby, and hurry up."

"Oh, isn't it delightful!" exclaimed Evelyn, as the horse set off at a swinging trot. "If I could always hire a hansom, I should never want to have a carriage."

"You shall have both carriages and hansoms when I come into the Mount Eden property, Eve, for I shall never forget what friends we have been—the very best of friends, eh?" he continued, as he pressed the hand he held in his.

Evelyn was in a flutter of delight.

Will had never been more affectionate in his manner, nor looked more handsome than he did that night, and she watched all he said and did with a proud feeling of possession. The only thing which disturbed her was the probable expense of the hansom cab; but Will seemed to have plenty of money in his pocket, and paid the fare when they arrived at their destination without any demur. Then they went into their seats—two of the best seats in the theatre—and for the next three hours the girl could think of nothing but the scene before her, and the actors who took part in it.

Will did not seem as interested as she was. He had often been to the play, and the novelty of the thing was past for him. But he was very kind and attentive. He slipped out of his seat several times between the acts, coming back more demonstrative and affectionate after each absence, and pressing Evelyn to take coffee, and ices, and

all sorts of things to which she was unaccustomed. But, as for her, she felt as if she had been transported to heaven. The drama enchanted her, but her cousin's kindness pleased her still more. Her large, soft eyes sought his gratefully, even whilst she modestly declined his offerings; and his generosity delighted her so much, that she forgot to wonder where the money came from which he wished to throw about so freely. But when the evening's amusement was concluded—when the lights were out and the curtain had dropped for the last time on the mimic world which had seemed so real to her—and they were walking back together, the fear that Will might be outstripping his means recurred to her. They had left the noisy traffic of the principal streets behind them by that time, and were treading the (comparatively speaking) quiet road which led to their home.

"Will, dear," she said, a little timidly, "I am so much obliged to you for taking me out to-night. I have enjoyed myself beyond measure, but I am afraid it must have cost a lot of money. You must not be extravagant, you know, or you will make me miserable. Hasn't it made a great hole in your week's salary? What will you do if you run short?"

"That's no affair of yours, my dear," he said gaily. "All you have to do when I take you out is to enjoy yourself and look your best, and leave the rest to me. And you *have* been looking your best to-night, Eve. I was quite proud of you. I believe in a year or two that you'll be quite handsome. Your eyes are glorious, and when you are happy you get such a nice color."

"O Will!" she cried, blushing all over, "what nonsense you do talk. I can never be *that*, and you must know it. But if you think I am—*nice*, it is all I care for."

The words came out with a burst, from the very bottom of her heart, but they conveyed no news to Will Caryll. There had been love passages between these two before—very innocent, but unmistakable. Nothing definite, perhaps, but warm looks, and soft whispers, and touches of the hands, that had left an indelible impression on the heart of Evelyn Rayne. And just now Will Caryll was moved as well. The time and the proximity—to say nothing of the wine he had imbibed at the theatre, and the real liking he entertained for his cousin—were having their effect upon the

young man, and likely to make him say a great deal more than he intended.

"Think you *nice!*" he repeated, with a fervent pressure of the arm which was slipped within his own. "I should think I *did* think you nice. Why, Eve, you're the very best girl in all the world to me! What should I do without you? Who is it mends my linen, and looks after my meals, and makes me comfortable in every possible way, unless it is yourself? Do you suppose I don't know that? Why, I couldn't live a week with Miss Rayne and all her fidgety ways if you were not there. You're *everything* to me, Eve. But you shall have your reward some day. Some day, when I am rich and prosperous, and the owner of Mount Eden, you shall see that I have not forgotten what you have done for me."

CHAPTER III.

A FALLING STAR.

"BUT I don't want any reward," said the girl shyly; "I do it because—because—because—"

"Because *why?*" he demanded, looking down upon her triumphantly.

"Because you are my cousin," she answered more firmly; "and it is pleasant to wait on you. If relations cannot help each other, who will?"

Young Caryll did not like this general way of putting it.

"That's all very fine, Eve, but you don't mean it. Uncle Roger is your relation as well as myself, but I'm sure you wouldn't care to wait upon him."

"But I have never seen him, Will, except once—long ago—when poor mother took me to his house, and then I was only a little thing of four. I can't even remember what he is like. Do tell me. I am anxious to know."

"He's as ugly as sin," replied Will, knitting his handsome brows, "and just as unpleasant. He's got a long, sallow face, with bushy grey eyebrows, and eyes that seem to look you straight through, like a hawk, and a mouth that snaps together like a rat-trap. However, if he's going to leave me Mount Eden I suppose I must put up with it all."

"Will, dear," interposed the girl timidly, "I wouldn't make *too* sure of that, if I were you. You would be so disappointed if it never came true; and if uncle is so disagreeable and unpleasant, he might change his mind, and leave his money to some one else. Besides, Aunt Maria says it is not impossible he might marry again. Other men have done it at that age, and so many women would take him, just for his money. I have often thought myself, since Cousin Hugh was drowned, that uncle might think of taking a second wife."

"Eve! you have the most unpleasant way of looking at things sometimes. You generally manage to dash all a fellow's hopes to the ground."

"Oh, no, Will; don't say that. I only want to make you practical. For, supposing neither of these things came to pass, still Uncle Roger may live for a long, long time yet. He is only sixty, and that is not old for a man, you know. So I hope you will try not to think of, or depend in any way on, Mount Eden or the money until it is really yours."

"*Why*, in heaven's name?" he asked her, in an irritable tone.

"Because I am so afraid it will make work more distasteful to you than it is. You don't love it too well, Will, already."

"You are right. I hate it. But look here, Eve. What's the use of telling me not to think about it? Who could help thinking of it? There is no one else in all the world for the old miser to leave it to—except *you*."

Eve burst out laughing.

"O Will! what nonsense. As if he *would*. But if he *did*, it would come to the same thing, for I should give it all to you. What good would it be to me without you?"

"You dear girl!" he answered, pressing her arm to his side. "It was just what I was going to say myself. We are Uncle Caryll's only relations. The property *must* come to one or other of us two. He couldn't in decency leave it to a stranger. And whichever of us gets it, will share it with the other. Is that a bargain?"

"Yes, yes, with all my heart," cried Eve.

"But there is only one way of doing it, my dear," continued Will, as they passed into the shadow of a leafy square, "and that is by marrying each other. Will you

promise to marry me, Eve?—not just directly, of course, because we are both too young, but by-and-bye, when I earn a decent salary, and my prospects are a little more settled."

Under the shade of the leafy lime trees, Eve blushed a vivid red from brow to bosom. In the quiet of its shuttered houses, Will Caryll could hear the rapid beating of her heart. This was what she had been dreaming of for a year past, but never hoped to gain—the bright vision of happiness that had danced before her waking eyes, but burst like a bubble with the sigh that dispersed it. What was *she*—unformed, uncultivated, ill-favored, and ill-dressed—that *he*, the very incarnation of youthful manhood and beauty, should stoop to woo her for his wife? Is not this the way that all true, good women receive a declaration of love from the man they secretly adore? Are not modesty and a want of self-esteem the chief characteristics of merit as they are of talent? No true genius was ever self-satisfied or affected. No woman, presuming on her natural gifts to consider herself superior to the rest of her sex, ever turns out satisfactory in domestic life. The more we have in this world the less we think of it. As for poor Evelyn, she was so overpowered by the idea of her cousin's condescension, that she could not answer him for her tears.

"Won't you say 'Yes?'" whispered Will, as his arm stole round her waist: "or don't you think you like me well enough?"

"*Like you!* O Will! my darling Will, you know—you must understand. But are you sure that I am good enough?"

"Why, of course I am sure. You don't suppose I want a wife with nothing but a pretty face to recommend her, do you? That might be all very well for some fellows, but it wouldn't suit me. I should have all the men running after her. No, no; women are meant to be useful, and look after their homes and their husbands, and make them happy and comfortable, and no one could ever take such care of me as you, Eve. I feel more sure of that every day; and so, when I can afford to set up housekeeping, you must marry me and keep me in order, and we'll be as happy as the day is long. Turn your face this way, Eve, there's no one looking, and give me a kiss to seal the bargain."

What was it that she missed (unsophisticated as she was), even whilst her young lover's handsome face was pressed against her own? Will Caryll, in his selfishness and vain assurance that his proposal must be flattering, couched in however careless terms, had overlooked one of the surest inroads to a woman's heart.

Evelyn Rayne was not really ugly, although she considered herself to be so. She was a tall, awkward-looking girl, who required filling out to soften down her large features and long, ungainly limbs. She knew this, and she lamented over it daily. She thought she was the very plainest girl in all Liverpool, and envied every pink and white smiling face she met; but however modest a woman may be with regard to her own appearance, she never likes her lover to agree with her. She may smile at his weakness, and consider him prejudiced, or blind, but she loves him all the more for his folly, and cannot bear to think that this idol of her imagination should view her with the same eyes she does herself.

But though Evelyn felt the want of something in Will Caryll's address, she was too humble to acknowledge it. It was too good of him—so she unconsciously argued—to want her in any capacity, and she lifted hér beaming face to his, with a heart over-brimming with gratitude. How much better women are to men than men are to women! Were it not that they idealized them thus from first to last, elevating their lovers to gods, and seeing the gilding that still clings round the fallen idol, how many marriages would take place, or last when they were consummated? The humanitarians and social scientists declare that the increase of separation and divorce in these days is due to the increase of vice. But they are wrong. It is due to the advance of knowledge; and wherever the people have become freed from the bondage of the Church, and find help instead of opposition from the Law, there the women's eyes have been first opened to the weakness of which they have been guilty in submitting to tyranny and oppression.

But Evelyn's heart was as ignorant as it was innocent. This was not the first kiss, by many, that had been exchanged between the cousins, but it was the first that Will had ever given her in the character of lover, and Eve felt the difference at once, and never again forgot it. It changed her from a child to a woman. She walked the

rest of the way home by his side in a species of silent, delirious delight, and more than once he stooped his head again to renew the caress. But as they stood on the door-step of Miss Rayne's house, they awoke from their dream of future bliss.

"I hope your aunt will have gone to bed," whispered Will, as he fumbled with the latch-key; "and then we can have a few minutes in the parlor to ourselves."

But Miss Rayne was not in bed. As soon as they stepped into the hall, she confronted them.

"Dear, dear!" she said testily, "how late you are. Do you know that it's past twelve? I've been expecting you for the last hour."

"I'm very sorry, Aunt Maria," replied Evelyn, on whose cheek and in whose eyes the glow of her new-born happiness was still apparent; "but the play was not over till past eleven, and we walked home."

"Then you should have taken an omnibus. Mr. Gamble has been in for a long time, and asking to see Will Caryll. He's waiting for him in the front room now."

"Let him wait, then. It's past working hours. He's got no right to bother me now," cried Will who was somewhat elevated with love and wine.

Mr. Gamble was the cashier in his uncle's counting-house, in the firm of Caryll, Tyndal & Masters, timber merchants. He had lodged with Miss Rayne for some years before the lad had ever been taken into the business. He was an extremely strict and somewhat stern monitor, and anything but a favorite with the youngsters in the office, but he was, at the same time, a perfectly just and honorable man.

"Let old Gamble wait," repeated Will Caryll recklessly. "He has nothing to do with me till Monday morning."

"Perhaps not, Mr. William," said the cashier, opening the door of his sitting-room, "but you will acknowledge that Mr. Caryll has. On my return this evening, I found a note from him that demands your immediate attention. Be good enough to step in here."

The lad turned red, but was compelled to obey. He had only just time to give Evelyn a significant glance before Mr. Gamble's door had swallowed him up and closed upon him, as she was left alone with Miss Rayne.

"Now, Evelyn, you had better go to bed at once, or I

never shall get you up in the morning," exclaimed her aunt briskly ; " you are looking quite fagged out."

She was indeed looking tired. All the beautiful, rosy flush had faded from her face, and her eyes were strained and anxious.

" O auntie, do let me stay till Will comes back. I want so much to hear why Mr. Gamble wished to speak to him. He looked so cross. Do you think there can be anything wrong? "

" Wrong? Nonsense ! Of course not ; unless Will's been inking the desks, or cutting up the stools, or doing some other stupid, boyish trick. Your uncle's not the man to stand anything of the sort. He's very particular. I remember your mother saying that his own wife didn't dare disobey him. He'd disinherit Will Caryll to-morrow if he offended him. And a good job, perhaps, if he did. It might make him think of you. For why his brother's son should have everything, and his sister's daughter nothing, beats me altogether. It's neither sense nor justice, and it'll bring down a judgment on him ; and some day I shall go up to the office and tell him so."

" O auntie, dear, don't worry yourself about that. It will all come right in the end," replied Evelyn, with a beautiful smile on her face ; " only I *should* like to hear what uncle can have written to Mr. Gamble about."

" Then your curiosity won't be satisfied till to-morrow morning, Evelyn Rayne, for you're going up to bed at once," said her aunt, as she pushed the girl before her up the stairs.

Eve gave one wistful glance at Mr. Gamble's closed door through which the cashier's voice could be heard speaking in very grave and measured tones, and submitted with a sigh to be elbowed up to her room. But when she reached it, she did not remove her things, but sat on the edge of her bedstead, listening for Will's step upon the stairs. She felt that she could not sleep until she had seen her cousin and learned the result of his interview with the cashier, for she felt frightened and nervous—she hardly knew why. She loved Will dearly, but she had not much faith in him. He seemed to carry off all his duties with such a high and careless hand. His step was long in coming. The voices in the little parlor below seemed to wax louder and louder, till they rose to an altercation, and

then Mr. Gamble seemed to say something that apparently left him master of the field, for his hard, incisive tones continued to sound alone for some time afterwards, whilst Will listened in silence.

Evelyn's heart began to ache for him.

What was that horrid Mr. Gamble saying to her darling to humble him like that? How she longed to be able to go down and be present at the interview, of which her betrothal of that evening seemed to give her the right to be an auditor. But she knew that was impossible. All she could do was to wait till Will came upstairs to his own room, which lay next to hers at the back of the house, to give him a last assurance of her love and sympathy. So she resigned herself to dreaming over again of that happy hour she had passed with him whilst coming home, and wondering, with all the humility of her loving heart, how such a blessing could have fallen to her share.

Meanwhile, Mr. Gamble was saying to her piece of perfection below—

"It's a mysterious business altogether, Mr. William, and one that we don't like."

"Well, *I* know nothing of the matter, sir."

"That is where the fault lies. You *should* know something of it. It is your business to know. The stamp and paper outlay is in your department, and Mr. Caryll expects a strict account to be kept of both. It is only right it should be so. No business can be properly conducted without every expenditure being accurately checked. We have never had any error of this kind in the office before, and it reflects on everybody employed there."

"That's just it," cried young Caryll; "everybody is asking for them each minute of the day, and it is impossible to note down every postage stamp that is used. They don't leave me alone two minutes together, either. I'm in and out of my desk like a Jack-in-the-box. How on earth can I be responsible for the clerks taking the stamps and papers when I am not there?"

"We are not accustomed to robbery in Water Street, Mr. William," replied Mr. Gamble drily; "all our clerks are tried and honest men who have mostly been with us for years."

"Every man is honest till he's proved to be a thief," said Will insolently.

"Do you mean to accuse anybody, sir?"

"No; but I mean to excuse myself. My uncle charges me with carelessness in keeping my books. I *won't* acknowledge it. I have entered all my own transactions carefully, but I can't be answerable for what other people may do."

"Well, sir, you'll have to be more careful for the future," replied the cashier, "for it has come to Mr. Caryll's ears, and he seldom passes over a fault for the second time."

Will had grown very red and angry during this discussion.

"You seem to forget that I am Mr. Caryll's nephew and nearest relation," he said haughtily. "You are talking to me, Mr. Gamble, as if I was the office-boy."

"No, Mr. William, I forget nothing; but neither, will you find, does Mr. Caryll, even though you *are* his nearest relation. He is a just employer, but a very strict one. So I advise you to keep your books more accurately for the future. And that is all!"

"I don't want your advice, and I shall go and see my uncle to-morrow and speak to him about it myself," retorted Will, as he left the room and slammed the door after him.

He had appeared very brave whilst he was in Mr. Gamble's presence, but he did not feel so as he quitted it. It was a most unpleasant charge to have brought against him, and something very like fear knocked at his heart as he hastily reviewed the incidents of the last few days, and wondered in what he had been so careless as to leave his carelessness open to discovery. His handsome face was looking rather white and drawn as he walked slowly up the narrow staircase, and approached Evelyn's room. As he drew near it, the door softly opened, and showed her standing on the threshold, ready to comfort him. But Will was in no gracious mood just then. The great event of the evening, which filled Evelyn's heart, and mind, and brain, had evaporated from his memory under the unpleasantness to which he had been subjected. He was perplexed and ill at ease, and all he wanted was to be alone, and think the matter out. Eve's glowing, trustful face was a reproach to him, and he attempted to pass her with an ordinary good-night.

"O Will, don't leave me yet," she whispered entreatingly; "stop a moment and tell me the news. What was it all

about? How has it ended? It made me so nervous to hear Mr. Gamble speak to you in such a tone. Why is he angry?"

"*Nervous!*" he repeated irritably; "what should you be nervous about? It was only a matter of business. Go to bed, like a good girl, and don't make a fool of yourself, or we shall have Aunt Maria and Miss Fletcher up in a minute to know if there are burglars in the house."

Evelyn shrunk back disappointed.

"But won't you tell me what it is, Will? I have been sitting up all this time only to hear."

"Woman's fatal curiosity," he said, with an uneasy laugh. "And you've been listening with all your might, I suppose, trying to find out?"

"Oh, no; don't think me so mean as that. I would rather never know than listen. But is it a secret?" she added, more timidly.

"It's nothing that concerns you, my dear, and so good-night," he said turning the handle of his door.

"Will," whispered Evelyn, starting forward, "you're not sorry, are you, for what happened this evening? I've been thinking of it whilst you were downstairs, and wondering if it can really be true. It has made me so happy. Are you sure—*quite* sure—you will be so too?"

"Oh, don't worry me now," he answered impatiently. "I cannot answer you. I have other things to think of. Happy? Of course I shall be happy, but just at this moment I am too tired to think of anything but bed."

Then, seeing her earnest face, with its two big eyes shining upon him, and a wistful expression in them that looked like the forerunner of tears, he somewhat repented of his curtness, and turned towards her again.

"Good-night, my darling," he said, with a hasty kiss; "go to sleep now, or you will be tired to death to-morrow morning."

But Evelyn could not go to sleep. The kiss was burning on her face, and the fond name ringing in her ears, and yet there was a void somewhere in her heart which remembrance could not fill. Everything had seemed so bright and easy a short hour ago, and now a falling star seemed to have shot across her sky and left it dark again. What was the reason?

CHAPTER IV.

THE OATH.

But, with the morning light the evening cloud dispersed. It was a bright, sunny Sunday, and Evelyn rose from her bed, happy and hopeful, and all eagerness to renew the pleasure of the night before. After which, it was disappointing to find that Will did not appear at breakfast, but had told Sarah to carry up a cup of tea to his room instead. She would not confess it to herself, but she wished he had been as anxious to see her again, under the new relationship they bore to one another, as she was to meet him. She mourned in silence, but Miss Rayne was loud in her denunciation of his indolence, and declared that Will Caryll always reminded her forcibly of the idle apprentice in Hogarth's picture, and she firmly believed he would come to the same bad end.

"Lying in bed, indeed, and on a Sunday morning, just for all the world as if he were the Prince of Wales!" she wrathfully exclaimed. "What next, I wonder? As if Sarah hadn't enough to do with getting ready the Sunday dinners, without running up and down stairs after him. You shouldn't have sent his tea up, Evelyn. If Mr. Will Caryll is too fine to come down to breakfast, let him go without it. I only wish his uncle could see him now."

"Let us be thankful he can't," replied Evelyn, with a faint laugh.

"Ah! but he'll hear of it, though, as sure as my name's Maria Rayne. I won't stand any more of Master Will's nonsense. If he can't behave himself properly, let him go somewhere else. I'm sure the miserable sum he pays for his board and lodging won't be missed. I could let his room alone for the same price to-morrow."

Evelyn left her seat, and put her arms round her aunt's neck.

"I know you could, auntie, but I'm sure you won't," she said coaxingly. "Will won't do it again, if you ask him;

and he is not fit to live by himself. He would get into all kinds of scrapes without you and me."

"Ah! there I believe you, Evelyn Rayne; but I won't stand his airs for all that. And you must leave off spoiling him in the way you do. He would be a thousand times better if you didn't coddle him. You make yourself a perfect slave to him, and he thinks the whole household is to follow suit; but he's mistaken."

"I won't send up his breakfast another time, auntie. But it was only a cup of tea, and Mr. Gamble kept him up late last night, and I thought perhaps his head ached."

"What did Mr. Gamble want with him, Evelyn?"

"I don't know; he didn't tell me."

"He's been up to some mischief in the office, I'll warrant. Well, I'm glad they've found him out, and I hope they'll punish him. A sound whipping would do him all the good in the world. But, bless me, it's past ten! Go and put on your things at once, Evelyn, or we shall be late for church."

And so the storm in a tea-cup blew over. But Evelyn's heart was not quite satisfied, even whilst praying for her absent young lover in the quiet church. It was very sweet to be able to pray for him as her own possession, and her face glowed as she thought that some day they would be kneeling thus together side by side, and all the world would know that they belonged to one another. But there was a cloud hanging over her spirits, even whilst she prayed—an undefinable shadow of coming evil, engendered partly by the mysterious interview with Mr. Gamble, and partly from Will's own secrecy concerning it.

But when they returned from church to partake of their early dinner of cold beef, and salad, and red-currant tart (by the way, why does every British householder consider it a point of religious etiquette to make himself miserable, not to say unchristian, by eating cold beef on the first day of the week?), her slight fit of despondency evaporated, for Will was in the parlor, ready to receive them, looking fresh and handsome in his Sunday suit.

It is true that he still seemed a little gloomy—some would have said sulky. He kept somewhat apart from his consin and Miss Rayne, apparently occupied in the perusal of a Sunday paper, but in reality chafing over the remembrance of the night before. Evelyn felt his altered manner, and was unhappy, but dared not attempt to comfort him.

Miss Rayne put some pointed questions to him about Mr. Gamble and his uncle's message, and was almost told by Will, in his turn, to mind her own business. So the dinner passed very unsociably, and the early part of the afternoon; and it was a relief to all concerned when young Caryll suddenly asked Evelyn to go with him for a walk. Her aunt gave a ready consent to the proposal; she was glad to get rid of them. Will Caryll's manner made her angry, and Eve's evident sympathy with him irritated her. She told them to go by all means, and not to come back till they could make themselves agreeable.

"Old cat!" said Will, alluding to Miss Rayne, as they left the house together. "As if any one *could* make himself agreeable, sitting opposite to such a sour face. It's enough to turn all one's milk of human kindness to vinegar."

Eve did not reply. She was too loyal to join in a laugh against her aunt behind her back, but she dreaded lest the slightest reproof should increase the perturbation of Will's restless spirit. So they strolled away together rather silently, until they had left the crowded pavements behind them, and reached the road that led to the cemetery. This was a favorite Sunday evening walk of theirs, for both Evelyn's mother and Will's father lay buried there, amongst a whole family of Carylls. It seemed quite natural to them, on reaching it, to turn into the familiar path that led to their parents' graves, and it was not till they had arrived there that Will made any allusion to the incident of the night before.

But when Evelyn had sat down on the flat stone that covered her mother's resting-place, and commenced to make a daisy chain from the daisies that grew in the grass around it, he flung himself down on the ground by her side, and commenced, suddenly and passionately,—

"How I wish I was dead and buried, Eve, with the whole lot of them!"

His words hurt Eve terribly. If he really meant what he said, it was evident her love had no power to smooth over the annoyances of his daily life. And his, she felt, could make her contented under the bitterest trials.

"O Will, darling, how can you say such a dreadful thing? You don't think of *me*, nor of what I should feel if your wish came true."

"Well, I don't suppose I shall ever be of much good to

you, Eve. It will be a jolly long time before I make an independence at this rate. And then to think of Uncle Roger being so mean as to set that old beast Gamble to haul me over the coals in that fashion, for a thing that wasn't my fault any more than it was your's."

She knew the confidence was coming now, and, like a wise woman (as her after life proved her to be) she would not disturb it by a single word. She only drew nearer the spot where he had flung himself impetuously down, and passed her hand firmly and softly over his sunny hair. With that touch his courage seemed to return to him. It contained a power and reliability unknown to his weaker temperament, and he turned his cheek toward it gratefully.

"You may as well know the whole truth, Eve," he continued, though half-unwillingly, as though the tale were being drawn magnetically from him, and against his will, "for I know you are game, and won't tell. I have told you how stingy Uncle Roger is. I believe he counts every wafer and steel pen that comes into the office. The beastly things are kept in my department—I mean the stationry and stamps, and such like ; and I have to give them out to the other fellows as they're required, and keep an account of them. Well, I believe I've been robbed. Somebody's been prigging the paper and stamps when my back was turned, and my books don't tally with the expenditure—how can they?—and so there's a row."

"But why didn't you lock them up? Is there no convenience for such a purpose?" demanded Eve practically. "Has your desk no key?"

The idea of fraud was so foreign to her own nature, which was as frank and open as the day, that she could conceive no other reason than carelessness for such an error. Her questions—simple as they were—seemed to make her cousin impatient.

"How can I be always locking up?" he exclaimed, in a tone of annoyance: "do you imagine we walk about the counting-house with the keys jingling in our pockets like a lot of old women? It's uncle's business to look after his clerks, and keep them in better order. What right have they to enter my desk? Not that any one else would ever have discovered the loss of a dozen miserable postage stamps."

"Was it only a dozen?" asked Eve innocently.

"A dozen—more or less. I know nothing about it. I've not even seen the books."

"Will, dear," said the girl coaxingly, "you are *sure* you have not been careless with them yourself?"

For she remembered to have felt surprised a few weeks previously at the amount of postage stamps she had discovered lying in one of his drawers, at the bottom of his collars and handkerchiefs. She had wondered what he should have bought them for, for Will had few relations to correspond with, and, like all lads of his age, he detested letter writing. But she was quite unprepared for the manner in which her suggestion was received. Will Caryll shook his head free from her caressing gestures as though her hand had stung him, and turned round upon her in a regular fury.

"How dare you say such a thing as that? Do you take me for a thief?" he exclaimed. His angry face and voice frightened her, and she burst into tears.

"No, no, of course not. O Will, how *could* you think so, even for a moment? Oh, forgive me, dear. I only meant that, when things lie about in such profusion, we are all apt to imagine them of little consequence. Is it likely I could have meant anything worse than that?"

Will's face was very white and strained looking, but at the sight of her tears it relaxed, though slowly.

"Whatever you may have meant, Eve, your words sounded very strange, and so would any one say who heard them. I have told you that I know nothing about it, and it's very hard if *you* won't believe me."

"But I *do* believe you, dear—dearest Will. I believe you as I do in heaven. I would die this moment in defence of your truth. I wish I had cut my tongue out before I had said those silly words," said Evelyn, still weeping.

"Never mind. They are forgiven and forgotten," replied Will magnanimously, as he lifted his face to hers, and kissed her tears away. "I love to receive the assurance of your faith in me, Eve, for I may want your help to get me out of this scrape—indeed, I do want it, even now."

"Then you have it, Will, before you ask for it," said Evelyn, as she dried her wet face. "Surely you know that. But what can I do for you?"

"First, give me another kiss. That's right. Husbands

and wives should never quarrel, and you are almost my wife, you know, Eve, and anything I may ask you to do you must remember is for vour husband that is to be. Will you, darling?"

Eve pressed closer to him, and laid her cheek upon his shoulder. Her heart was too full to speak.

"I'm in an awful mess, my dear, and that's the fact. Now, don't look so frightened. It's nothing out of the way, and only what was to be expected with the wretched salary I receive. What fellow could dress and live on a pound a week? It's impossible. Go where I will, I can't get a dinner under two shillings; and this suit I have on cost three pounds. And then there are my boots, and collars, and shirts, and a dozen small expenses. The man must be a fool who expects a pound a week to do all that. I told you yesterday, you know, that I've got a pressing tailor's bill. They've threatened to send it in to my uncle for the last six weeks, and I've kept them off and off, hoping to screw up courage to ask the old miser to give me an advance, just to keep them quiet, but this last business has spoilt everything. If Todson's bill is sent in on the top of it, it will settle my hash to a certainty."

"I don't quite understand," said Eve, with knitted brows.

"I mean that I shall get my dismissal, and then, perhaps, I shall lose Mount Eden, and the money, and everything—you into the bargain, Eve, for what chance shall we ever have of being married if I am thrown out into the world again? You *must* help me, darling. You are such a clever girl. I am sure that you can manage it."

"But *how*, dear Will? What can I do?"

"Go and see Todson for me to-morrow morning,—I'll give you his address,—and coax him to let the bill stand over till I'm a little straight again. Tell him I'm Uncle Caryll's heir,—he'll believe *your* word, though he won't mine,—and that I'm bound to have lots of money before long, and if they'll wait my time, I'll get everything I want from them."

"But suppose they *won't* wait, Will?"

"They *must*, Eve, or I shall be ruined. They wait other fellows' convenience; why shouldn't they mine? Surely you can make up a tale to satisfy them. They think I'm hoaxing them just to put off payment, but if you

corroborate my story, they will see there is truth in it. You can tell them we're engaged, if you like, too, just to prove you know all about me."

"Oh, no, Will! I couldn't do *that*," replied Eve, shrinking from the idea, "and I don't think it would do any good either; but I can only tell them we *think* you will be Uncle Caryll's heir, dear, because it's not certain, you know."

"It is certain," returned the young man hotly; "Pitman has seen the will, and in default of Hugh Caryll's turning up again, I inherit everything. That's why it seems so hard that uncle won't give me a decent salary now. He has thousands and thousands, and I,—his only brother's only son—have nothing. But it can't be helped, at all events for the present, and it's no good crying for the moon. But will you go and see Todson, Eve, the very first thing in the morning?"

"Yes; if you wish it," she said, sighing, "as soon as Aunt Maria will let me leave the house. But I have no hope of success, Will; it is so unlikely they will listen to what a girl like myself may have to say."

"You must *make* them listen! You must talk in a tone of authority, and if they still insist upon sending the bill in to uncle, tell them he's gone abroad for an indefinite period, and so it will be of no earthly use. And if they won't hear reason, then, by Jove! I'll intercept every letter that comes to the office till I get hold of theirs, for it shall never reach his hands, if I die for it."

Eve was silent. Will's vehemence frightened her, and all this subterfuge and fraud was so distasteful to her feelings, that she could only sit there shrinking, and sick at heart. And yet she could not make up her mind to rebuke his design, not just now at least, when he was in such trouble, and had come to her for comfort. She would not acquiesce in his determination, nor show approval of it, but she evinced her sympathy in his distress by gentle caresses and words of encouragement, and Will returned them both so freely, that, for the time being, they were perfectly happy, and forgot everything but their mutual affection. As the lengthening shadows warned them that it was time to go home again, Eve took the rose from her belt, and laid it on her mother's grave.

"Poor, dear mother," she said softly; "I wonder if she was ever as happy as I am now?"

"You were very fond of your mother, Eve?"

"Oh, yes; as fond as a little child who knows nothing of death and separation can possibly be. I can remember now, how I saw her lie on her couch, and grow weaker and weaker day by day, and never thought that she was going to leave me. How should I? If any one had told me she was dying, I shouldn't have known what the word meant. And then the last day came, and I was carried to her bedside to kiss her for the last time, and she kept on whispering, 'Come to me, my little Eve, come soon!' I shall never, never forget it."

"And you want to see her again, I suppose?"

"*Want it*, Will?" cried Evelyn, with eyes flashing through her tears; "never a day passes but I think of mother and pray for our meeting. I didn't appreciate her whilst she was here—my dear, sweet mother. I was too young to know how sad and lonely my life would be without her; but when I meet her again I will tell her how I loved and missed her after she was gone. Sometimes, Will," continued the girl, dropping her voice to a whisper, "I fancy—don't think me foolish or superstitious, dear, for I am not that—but sometimes, when you are all in bed and asleep, I fancy I hear my mother's voice, and feel her breath upon my cheek. Do you think it can be *only* fancy? It has come so often, and it makes me so glad to think she may be there. *If* she can come back to earth, Will, who should she come to but myself?"

"Ah, *if!*" replied the lad incredulously; "but, you see, people *don't* come back, Eve; and all the stories you hear about ghosts and apparitions are nonsensical lies."

Evelyn's face lowered.

"I shouldn't like to believe that," she said; "it would rob me of one of my greatest comforts."

"I am afraid you love your mother better than you do me, Eve."

The suggestion roused her at once from her reverie.

"Oh, no, no! How can you say such a thing? They are such different loves! I cannot even compare them. Had mother lived she would have been my comforter, and counsellor, and friend; but you, Will—you are *my world!*"

The fervor and solemnity of her tone, the bright, glowing face, that swam in excited tears, and the grasp she laid upon his arm, all showed what Evelyn Rayne was made

of, and startled Will Caryll, in spite of his self-conceit. Here was a character of which *his* had not even the power to sound the depths, far less to understand and value. It was a loving *woman*, notwithstanding her seventeen years, that clung to his arm and pledged a life's faith to him—a pledge she would amply redeem. Will Caryll could not quite understand her enthusiasm, nor had he the least idea of the solemn vow her heart registered as her lips pronounced the words, but he fully sympathized with the outward tokens of her affection which ministered to his love of self. So he placed his hand firmly over hers, and looked her full in the eyes.

"I believe you *do* love me, Eve. Then kneel down here and swear, by your mother's memory, and all your hopes of meeting her again, that you will be faithful to me, and help me all your life long."

"Oh! that is easy." cried the girl, as she sank upon her knees and clasped her hands together. "I swear it solemnly, by all my hopes of salvation."

He knew that she was his now—his to the very end. Evelyn Rayne was not the sort of girl to swear an oath and break it. His shallow nature could admire and lean upon hers, even while he had no desire to emulate its virtues.

"I think we had better go home now," he said, as he raised her and drew her arm within his own. "I seem to have learnt more about you, Eve, during these last few days, than I ever did in my life before. I feel I can depend upon you. I am sure that you will never desert me, nor turn against me, nor betray me, whatever I may do."

"I am glad of that," she answered simply. "It is just what I should wish you to feel."

They had a peaceful evening after that, and apparently a happy one, but neither of them was at ease. Will brooded over his coming interview with his uncle (for, of course, he had never carried out his bragging determination to visit him with an explanation), and Eve pondered fearfully over her visit to the tailor. She had promised to go, and she should fulfil her promise, but she had no idea of what she should say when she got there. She was up early, as usual, the following morning to see Will off to his uncle's office, but the cousins had no opportunity for a private conference. All he could say, as Eve followed him into the passage, under pretence of brushing the dust off

his coat, was, "Don't forget Todson, whatever you do!" and *she*, looking up into the lad's perturbed countenance, answered, "No, darling, no."

She found great difficulty, however, in leaving the house without informing Miss Rayne of her destination. She was usually so frank and open in all her actions (having nothing to conceal), that she lingered about for some time, wondering what valid excuse she could make for going out. Luckily, however, for her enterprise, Miss Rayne required some knitting yarn from a particular shop in Liverpool, and told Evelyn, if she had nothing better to do, that she might go and fetch it. By which means she found herself, before the clock had struck twelve, standing on the threshold of the tailor's shop, and inquiring, in a very shaky voice, if she could speak to Mr. Todson. An apprentice ushered her into a back room, where a pursy little man, with a stout figure and a bland countenance, stood smiling and rubbing his hands together.

"And what can we do for you to-day, Miss?" he commenced deferentially; "ladies' ulsters—walking suits—riding-habits—"

Poor Eve, attired in a brown holland dress, that had been nearly washed white, with a little black cape of the fashion of five years before, and a straw hat of no fashion at all, looked a very unlikely customer for any of the articles he mentioned, unless, indeed, it were for an ulster to cover all her other deficiencies.

"No, thank you. I have not come to give an order," she replied, blushing and stammering. "I wish to speak to you, Mr. Todson, about a bill—Mr. William Caryll's bill—that you have told him you will send in to his uncle, Mr. Roger Caryll, of Water Street."

The tailor's face changed immediately. From a round, rosy, smiling countenance, it seemed to become elongated, sallow, and sour.

"Oh, yes, indeed," he answered, in a dry, acrid voice, "Mr. William Caryll has been on our books for a long time—and a *very* long time—it is quite essential we should take some steps to recover our money. It is altogether against our rules to give credit. We have been indulgent to Mr. William Caryll, hitherto, on account of his youth, but there is a limit, even to our patience. But perhaps you have come to pay the account, Miss?"

"Oh, no. I wish I had," said Eve, deeply blushing; "but I am sure you will get the money if you will be so good as to wait a little longer. I am Mr. William Caryll's cousin, and I know all about my uncle's intentions respecting him. Will you let me tell you something about them? I think you will see the matter in a different light when you have heard what I have to say."

Her voice was so sweet and earnest, and she looked so interesting as she stood there, pleading her cousin's cause, that Mr. Todson's sour face relaxed a little and, though he still retained an expression of Spartan-like firmness, he fetched a chair, and, begging her to be seated, prepared to listen to her story.

CHAPTER V.

THE BILL IS PAID.

With some confusion and a great many blushes, Eve entered in details, telling the tailor that Will Caryll was his uncle's nearest relation, and that it was almost certain that he would inherit his property, and be able to pay off fifty such bills with half-a-day's income. But that unlucky word *almost*, like the proverbial slip 'twixt the cup and the lip, marred her eloquence, and as she falteringly proceeded, her heart sunk to see the look of incredulity that settled down on Mr. Todson's countenance, and the sarcastic smile that curled about the corners of his mouth.

"I wouldn't think of doubting your word, Miss," he said, as Evelyn concluded her statement; "but you'll pardon me for saying I've heard all this before. Mr. William Caryll's future prospects may be very good—I've no doubt they are, and I'm glad of it—but they have nothing whatever to do with his present liabilities. If he's going to be so rich, why don't he ask the old gentleman to pay his bills?"

"Oh, Uncle Roger wouldn't do that, I'm afraid, Mr. Todson, for he is very strict and particular, and my cousin would not dare tell him he was in debt, but if you would wait a little longer—"

"I can't wait any longer—I'm sorry, Miss, but I can't afford to do it. Fifty pounds is a large sum, and—"

"*Fifty pounds!*" interrupted Eve, with a look of horror; "you don't mean to say that Will owes you fifty pounds?"

"Fifty pounds, eleven shillings and threepence," repeated Mr. Todson solemnly. "The account has been running on now for over two years, and Mr. William Caryll knew ours to be a ready-money establishment when he began to deal here. I've let him off again and again, Miss. He promised me immediate payment twelve months ago. It's nonsense of him, as of anybody—begging your pardon, Miss—asking me to wait for money that mayn't come to him for the next twenty years, unless he can raise something on it now. Is it fair or just, Miss? I put it to you as a lady!"

"No," replied Evelyn sadly. "It is neither fair nor just. But I suppose at the time he really hoped he should get the money."

"Hoping won't pay me," observed Mr. Todson, "and I see no way of being righted except laying the case before Mr. Caryll, senior. He is a just and upright gentleman (as I hear), and won't see a tradesman defrauded of his due."

"But you will ruin Will—I mean my cousin—if you do that, Mr. Todson; uncle will be so very angry. Perhaps he will turn him straight out of the office, and then there will be no chance of your getting your money at all."

This contingency seemed to have some influence on the tailor. He screwed up his mouth, put his head on one side, like a crow looking at a bone, and considered for a moment in silence.

"If you will only wait a week longer," continued Eve, taking advantage of the situation, "I will try and see what can be done. Give him one more week, Mr. Todson, and then, if he cannot pay you, you must do what you think right."

"Very well, Miss," replied the tailor; "for your sake I will make one more concession. My letter to Mr. Caryll, senior, shall be kept back for a week, and if I don't hear from you in that time, it will be sent in as first intended."

"Thank you—thank you for your kindness, Mr. Todson, and I hope things will be comfortably settled in the course of a few days," said Eve, as she left the shop.

But the hope was a very faint one, and the farther she left Todson's behind her, the fainter it seemed to become.

Neither she nor Will had any money beyond a few shillings, and Miss Rayne would be as little likely to help in such a cause as Mr. Caryll himself.

No; they must not even tell Miss Rayne of what had occurred. She had taken in Will Caryll as a boarder because her straightened circumstances would not permit her to refuse such an offer, but she heartily disliked the lad, had done so from the beginning, and lost no opportunity of letting him see it. So Eve went home with a heart full of despair.

As soon as ever Will returned in the evening, he ran upstairs to inquire what success she had had with the tailor. Eve's room was at the very top of the house. It was not much more than an attic, with the drap-door (before alluded to) in the ceiling that led out upon the roof, but the girl was neat and tasteful, and had made the little apartment look like herself. On the cheaply-papered walls hung the photographs of her few friends, in frames of her own manufacture, Will Caryll's holding the place of honor as might be well expected. Her books and workbasket—her flowers, and a pet canary singing in a cage—all contributed to mark the little chamber as her own, and no one entered it but those whom she invited there.

"What news, Eve?" exclaimed Will, as she turned to greet him. "What did old Todson say?"

"Not very good news, dear Will," she answered cheerfully, "but better perhaps than we had a right to expect."

She then related exactly what had taken place between her and the tailor. Her story was followed by an ominous silence.

"Don't fret, dear," she said, with an attempt at comfort. "Hope for the best. We have a whole week, you see, to think it over in. Surely we can do something in that time."

"*Hope for the best!*" he repeated bitterly; "what best is there to hope for? You've bungled the business, Eve; I was afraid you would. You didn't lay it on thick enough, or the old brute would have been more amenable."

"Indeed, Will, I said all I could. I almost knelt to him. But he said he *must* have his money, and all the respite I could get was a week."

"What's the good of a week?" continued her cousin. "Where's the money to come from at the end of a week?" He might just as well have made it this afternoon. I have no luck. Everything is against me. I wish that I was dead and buried."

And then, to Eve's infinite dismay, he laid his head down upon the bed, and burst into tears. She had never seen a man cry before. In her innocence, she thought they never *did* cry—not even when they were young and tender—and the sight filled her with terror lest Will should be going out of his mind.

"Oh, Will, Will! don't do that. You break my heart. What *is* the matter with you?"

"I cannot bear it," he cried passionately; "it is too much for any fellow to bear. I will kill myself. I will cut my throat, or take poison. It would be a thousand times better than living like this."

"But why should you say so, Will? Is there any fresh trouble? Was uncle very angry with you?"

"*Angry!* I shouldn't mind his anger. I'm used to it. He's always as cross as two sticks. But he insulted me. He said I was responsible for his beastly postage stamps, and he should deduct their value from my salary. I shall receive nothing next Saturday, nor for several weeks to come. They are going to cheat me out of my pay. And how am I to live? How am I to get my dinner, I should like to know? It is disgraceful. They ought to be ashamed of themselves."

And he relapsed into weak, childish tears, for which the prospect of his lost dinners were mostly responsible.

"Never mind, dearest," whispered the soothing, womanly voice, "I have a few shillings, you know, that I have earned for my Christmas cards, and I am owed several more. You shall not go without your dinners, Will. *I* will see to that. And for the rest, you must try to be patient and economical till this horrid business is settled."

"But there's Todson's bill—you don't think of that. If it reaches uncle's ears, he'll give me the sack, as sure as a gun." Evelyn sighed heavily.

"I tried so hard to persuade ..im not to send it into uncle at all," she said, "but he was obdurate. A week was all the grace I could get out of him. And it is such an awful sum, Will—fifty pounds, eleven shillings and

threepence. I don't think everything Aunt Maria possesses would sell for as much."

"What's the good of bothering over pounds, shillings and pence?" grumbled Will impatiently. "I couldn't pay it if it were half the sum. But what we've got to do is to prevent its reaching Uncle Caryll's ears. You are *sure* he said a week, Eve?"

"Yes, quite sure. He repeated it several times. He would wait one week longer, and if he did not hear from us by that time, he should send the bill straight to Water Street."

"I will kill myself before the end of it!" cried Will. "Don't you be surprised, Eve, if you miss me. Some night I shall not turn up as usual, and the next day you will hear that my body has been found floating in the canal. And then you can get another lover as soon as you like, and walk out with *him* to the cemetery on Sunday evenings instead of with me, and put a rose on *my* grave as you did last night on your mother's."

Of course she wept, womanlike, over the terrible picture the weak fool beside her had conjured up, and extracted many a promise from him to do nothing rash, but trust to her love to help him out of the difficulty. Still, the days wore away very gloomily. Evelyn ransacked her brain to think what she could do to help her cousin, but all her endeavors only resulted in the collection of a few shillings, which she tearfully made him accept. At last a grand thought struck her. When first it occurred, she put it from her as though it had been sacrilege, but it came back again and again, until she felt compelled to listen to the inward voice that suggested it. Evelyn had one possession of value—a dressing-case, containing her dead mother's jewellery. She hardly knew what it contained, still less of what intrinsic worth the ornaments might be. She had been allowed, on one or two occasions, to look at the contents of the dressing-case, but Miss Rayne always kept it in her own room. The jewels were Evelyn's, certainly, but they were far too valuable (so Miss Rayne said) to be entrusted to her care yet, and she should not have them until she was married. So Eve had come to regard these ornaments as sacred things—as part of her dead mother, indeed—and the idea of selling them seemed horrible to her. And yet, what was she to do? Her dear mother had left them to

her for her pleasure, not her pain, and would not *she* have parted with them soon enough if her husband had been in the same predicament as poor Will. Evelyn felt sure she would. It made her heart sore to think of the trinkets she had regarded as too good for her own use passing into the hands of strangers ; but if it were for Will, she would not hesitate for a moment. So, whilst Miss Rayne was busied in the kitchen on the following morning, Eve lifted down the dressing-case (of which she always kept the key) from the top of the wardrobe, and carried it carefully into her own room. There she set it on the bed and unlocked it, and revealed the contents. It was a cumbersome box—one of the old-fashioned rosewood cases—filled with cut-glass scent bottles, and pomatum pots with plated tops such as used to be much in request as wedding presents amongst the middle classes. This one was lined with dark-blue velvet, and had the scent of attar of roses and pastilles clinging to it as though it were a shrine. Evelyn lifted the tray reverentially, and took out the bracelets that lay underneath. They were very commonplace, and of no marketable value, but in her eyes they represented a little fortune. There was one formed of gold links like a cable chain, with a clasp in the shape of a heart, set with dark-glowing carbuncles ; and another like a snake, with turquoises in its head, and tiny ruby eyes, and several others of gold, and silver, and enamel.

Then the rings in the drawer beneath—the wedding ring with which she had always hoped to be married some day herself, although people told her it would be unlucky, and the engraved guard her poor mother had worn above it. And a beautiful half-hoop of emeralds, and a little finger-ring with a single diamond in it, and two mourning rings set with pearls. Beside these, there were four or five brooches and some earrings, and a gentleman's breast-pin of blue enamel, which she supposed had belonged to her father. They looked very grand when they were all laid out on the bed, and Eve thought they must be worth quite fifty pounds. She felt very much like crying when she thought of selling them. A great lump rose in her throat as she remembered that, once gone, they could never be got back again, and that all her life she would have to remain without her dear mother's rings, and brooches, and bracelets, which she had so looked forward to wearing.

But it was for Will—to ease dear Will's heart and set his mind at rest—and to accomplish that Eve would have gone through a still greater sacrifice. So she put back the wedding ring, and a scent bottle and thimble, with one or two trifles of the least value into the dressing-case, and locked them up again, and the rest of the trinkets she placed in her own drawer. She was not going to tell her Aunt Maria a word about the matter; not, at least, until the good she contemplated had been accomplished, for, after all, they were her own trinkets, and she had a right to do with them as she chose. So she put the dressing-case on the top of Miss Rayne's wardrobe again, where it was likely to remain undisturbed for any length of time. And then she returned, like a miser, to gloat over the treasures she had amassed in her own room. The greatest difficulty appeared to be how to dispose of them. The easiest way would have been to deliver them over to Will, but Eve had grave doubts whether her cousin was to be entirely trusted with articles of value; besides, she wanted to prepare a great surprise for him. If it was imperative that she should part with the most cherished treasures she possessed, she wanted to be able to go and put the money they realized into Will's lap, and see the look of surprise, and pleasure, and gratitude with which he thanked her for the sacrifice she had made. She knew of a shop where she had often read in passing that old gold, and silver, and jewellery was bought or exchanged, and the first time she could do so, without suspicion, she crept out to the place and laid her little packet timidly upon the counter. She had dreamed grand dreams of the sum of money it would bring her. One hundred—even two hundred pounds, perhaps (for the worth of her mother's legacy was priceless in her eyes), and then, when she had paid Mr. Todson's bill, how proud she would be to make dear Will a handsome present wherewith to tide over his difficulties.

But her hopes were soon dissipated. A half-grown youth tossed over the contents of the packet in a supercilious manner before he carried them to his employer (strange that those who live by sale and barter should always despise and treat with contumely such unfortunates as present anything to sell), who, having examined them much in the same spirit, advanced to where poor Evelyn stood, burning with shame and anxiety.

"You wish to sell these trifles, Miss?"

"Yes, if you will buy them," replied Eve.

"Well, they ain't of much value, you know," said the man, turning them over, with a shake of the head, and the *sotto voce* remark, "pal—try, pal—try!"

"Some of them are valuable, surely? The rings, for instance."

"Ah, well, the rings are not so bad. Well," tossing them all together in a heap, "what shall we say for the lot? Six pounds?"

Evelyn's face fell.

"*Six pounds!* Oh, no! Why, I have often heard my aunt say the emerald ring cost twenty-five. It was my uncle's wedding present to my mother."

"Perhaps—a long time ago. But the fashion's past, you see. We pay for fashion. No one would buy that ring now. It's second-hand."

"I will take them back, then," said Evelyn, with her spirits down at zero, but with a certain dignity in her manner.

"Stop a little, Miss; don't be in such a hurry," replied the pawnbroker, who did not wish to lose the chance of making a profitable bargain; "if you really want to part with the trinkets, I don't mind stretching a point, and giving you ten pounds for them, though I'm bound to be a loser by the transaction."

But Evelyn's spirit was roused by that time. She was a girl with any amount of spirit, though she had a humble opinion of her own merits, and a heart that succumbed to affection like a reed shaken by the wind. She saw the pawnbroker was taking advantage of her, and she refused to be cheated.

"No," she replied firmly, laying her hand upon the packet, "I will not part with them for ten pounds. I am sorry you cannot give me more, but it would be of no use to me."

"Come, now, Miss, I don't like to see you disappointed, so I'll make it fifteen, but that's the outside I can go. Take it or leave it; but it's my last word."

Evelyn hesitated. Fifteen pounds was a good lump of money. If it would not defray Mr. Todson's bill, it might at least induce him to wait a little longer for the rest. And if anything terrible happened to Will,—like being turned

out of the office,—he would be sorely in need of money to help him to live till he procured another situation. It was always a comfort to feel one had some money to fall back upon, and—yes, she had decided. She would accept the pawnbroker's offer.

"Very well," she said, in a trembling voice, "I will take fifteen pounds, though I am sure they are worth a great deal more."

"I don't know where you'd get it, then," replied the man somewhat insolently, as he swept the bracelets, rings, and brooches carelessly into a drawer, and counted out fifteen sovereigns into Evelyn's hand.

She felt very low-spirited as she left the shop, and remembered that she had parted with all the reminiscences that she possessed of her poor mother forever; but she had done what she believed to be right, and she was not going to cry over it. Rather, she looked forward to the moment when she should lay her little offering at her cousin's feet, and feel repaid for everything by his love and gratitude. When she reached home again, she felt really glad she had had the courage to do as she had done, for no one seemed to sympathize with Will's troubles but herself. Miss Rayne said she had no patience with him—that it served him right to have his salary stopped, and she hoped it would teach him to be more careful for the future. Mr. Gamble, too, seemed to keep up the feud in Miss Rayne's breast against the lad, for he never spoke to him out of office hours, nor mentioned his name without some indication of distaste. He was tabooed by all but Eve, who did her utmost to make up to him for the coolness of the others. It was the last day but one of the prescribed week, and nothing had been done towards paying Mr. Todson's bill. Eve crept up to her cousin's side that evening in silent sympathy. She had the fifteen pounds in her pocket, but she would not venture to speak of them until all other hope seemed over.

"To-morrow will be Wednesday, Will," she whispered; "what *will* you do?"

Young Caryll was leaning over the table, deep in the perusal of a newspaper. At her question he looked up.

"About old Todson's bill, do you mean? Don't worry yourself. *It is paid.*"

Eve almost screamed in surprise.

"*Paid!* Are you in earnest, Will? *Who* paid it? How did it happen? Did uncle give you the money?"

"Don't talk so loud. I don't want the whole house to hear my private affairs. *Uncle!* Not exactly. As if it is likely *he* would pay it. No, indeed, I paid it myself."

"But, Will, fifty pounds!" gasped Evelyn; "where did you get the money?"

He grew unaccountably red, and bent his head again over the paper. But she could see the red still, which mounted to his very forehead, and flushed the white parting of his fair hair.

"Where other fellows get money when they want it, Eve," he mumbled indistinctly. "From the money-lenders! Fellows with expectations are always able to raise a few pounds. I was a fool not to think of it before."

To know that the bill was settled, and the immediate danger over, was a great relief, and yet Evelyn did not like the manner of her cousin's speech. It was too jerky and unnatural. It seemed as if something had been left out which he was afraid to say. It was not like himself. For a moment she wondered if he had been drinking.

"But won't you have to pay the money back again?" she demanded gravely.

"Hang it all, Eve," he said irritably, "what a kill-joy you are. Yes, of course I shall, in about a hundred years hence, when uncle's dead, and I reign in his stead; but not till then, at all events. Anyway, Todson's paid, which is all you need concern yourself about. And if you don't believe me, there's the old brute's receipt."

And handing her the tailor's bill, he let her see the stamp and signature affixed to it.

Evelyn heaved a sigh, half of relief and half of fear. She was most thankful the immediate danger was over, but she dreaded a worse one in the future. Will was so thoughtless! He never seemed to live beyond the present. What if these money-lenders should press him for payment still more hardly than Mr. Todson had done? As she handed him back the receipt in silence, he seemed to guess at her suspicions.

"What are you so grave about, Eve?" he asked; "you don't look pleased even now. I thought you would be as glad as myself."

"So I am, Will—very glad; but I hope it is all right.

It seems so strange to be able to raise such a large sum of money so easily. Are you *sure* the men will wait till you can pay them?"

"They *must*, my dear. I'm not of age," he said airily; but though he laughed and professed to be at his ease, she saw that his gaiety was forced, and could not join in it as she would otherwise have done; and as soon as she conveniently could, she stole away to her own room.

There, as she was emptying the pockets of her brown holland dress, preparatory to going to bed, she came upon the little packet of sovereigns which she had placed there in readiness to put into Will's hand. She had almost forgotten them till then. In her astonishment at hearing that her cousin had no need of money, she had lost sight of the sacrifice she had made to procure him some. And it had been all in vain. She had sold her dead mother's trinkets for a paltry sum of fifteen sovereigns, whilst Will had found no difficulty in raising fifty pounds. As Evelyn thought of it, and that she had done that which she never could recall, her fortitude gave way, and she burst into tears.

CHAPTER VI.

IN HIDING.

NOTHING of consequence occurred during the next few days, except that Will Caryll took to staying out late at night—a practice to which he had never been addicted since he had lived in Miss Rayne's house. Aunt Maria grumbled considerably at the innovation. She considered him far too young to be trusted with a latch-key, neither did she approve of Eve sitting up to let her cousin in. In vain did the girl represent that Will, at twenty, was of an age to require more amusement than was to be found in their dull little parlor, and that it was only natural that he should sometimes like to go to the theatre, or join a smoking concert or a bachelor's party. Miss Rayne considered that a chat with his cousin, or a game of draughts with herself, ought to be sufficient recreation for any properly-constituted young man, and threatened more than once to bar

and bolt the front door, and put out the lights, and leave Will Caryll to sleep on the steps, if he felt so inclined. But somehow it always ended in Eve letting in the delinquent, and receiving him, like the prodigal son in the Scriptures, with the best welcome at her command. She fretted a little herself over his newly-developed love of roving and late hours, yet she never told him so, but was always ready with a smile of welcome to quietly unfasten the door, so that Aunt Maria should not notice the time of his return, and to serve him with such scraps of supper as she had been able to put aside for him. Once or twice, however, to her horror and consternation, Will did not seem quite himself on returning home. He always knew who she was, but his speech was thick and altered, and he stumbled about the passage, and insisted upon making a noise, notwithstanding all her entreaties to him to be silent. At such times his words and manners would be more free than usual, and he would shock her modesty instead of exciting her compassion. Eve would hurry over her duties as quickly as possible then, and run away to her own room to weep in secret over the defalcations of her hero. Yet, with it all, she did not love him less. What true woman ever loved a man less for the sins that are not sinned against herself? There is such a strong tide of maternal feeling welling up in every female breast, and ready to cast a cloak of protection over the creature that has proved himself to be weaker than herself. The very ease with which their husbands and lovers sin, seems to be an extra incentive for compassion from the women who love them. They pity them so much for their frailty. They fancy they must pity themselves so much that they need all the encouragement they can give them to heal their wounded vanity. It is only men who have named women "the weaker sex." In love and hate they are incomparably the stronger vessels of the two.

So Evelyn Rayne, smarting in sympathy with Will Caryll's troubles, forgot to blame him for the injudicious and selfish means by which he sought to allay them.

But one evening—it was the following Saturday—she did not believe he intended to come home at all. Miss Rayne sat nodding in her chair till twelve o'clock, and then ordered her niece to lock up the house and follow her to bed, threatening meanwhile to let Mr. Caryll know the

first thing on Monday morning how shamefully his nephew was behaving. Eve prepared to obey. She knew that it was useless to remonstrate ; besides, her aunt had right on her side. It was thoughtless and cruel of Will to keep them up like this, night after night, when he knew how much they had to do during the day. So she fastened the house-bolts, and put up the chain, and extinguished the gas, and went quickly up to her own room. Not that she had any intention of going to bed. As soon as she had undressed, she put on her wrapper, and blew out the candle, and, opening her casement window, sat down in the moonlight to watch and wait till she should hear the familiar sound of Will's knuckles rapping against the hall door. But the hours dragged on till one and two o'clock had sounded from a neighboring steeple, and still he did not come.

Eve was very weary. She had worked hard all day—for much of the housekeeping and house cleaning fell to her share—and at last she could keep awake no longer. Little by little her aching eyelids closed, and her head drooped upon her breast, and she fell fast asleep. By-and-bye—perhaps an hour afterwards—she waked suddenly and completely, as people are apt to wake who have fallen asleep watching. She fancied she had heard a sound. It must have been Will at the front door.

Eve started to her feet. Her first fear was that it might have been repeated several times, and that her aunt had heard it too. But as she became fully conscious, she was suddenly made aware that she was not alone. Before her, in the moonlight, stood a tall figure. Eve sprang to her feet with an exclamation of alarm. The figure grasped her by the arm. It was her Cousin Will.

"Hush!" he said, in a warning whisper. "Hush, Eve, for God's sake, or I am lost!"

Then Eve's sense and courage came to her assistance. She took in the situation at a glance. Something terrible had happened that required secrecy. She could not imagine what it was, but discovery meant harm to Will, so her first impulse led her to lock her bedroom door. Then she drew him to the farthest end of the room, and whispered,—

"What is it? Tell me quickly. How did you come here?"

He turned and pointed to the trap-door in the ceiling, which she now perceived, for the first time, to be open.

"Through there? By the roof?"

He nodded in reply.

"But *why?* What is the matter?"

"I have been there all the afternoon, Eve. I came in whilst you were at dinner, and crept up to your room. I am hiding. Hasn't Gamble told you? The officers are after me."

"What officers?"

"The officers of justice. Oh, Eve, I have a dreadful story to tell you; but it was not my fault—I assure you it wasn't."

Eve was shivering now, as if with cold.

"Tell me everything," she whispered; "I *must* hear it."

She made him sit close beside her on the bed as she spoke, and placed her ear to his mouth.

"Go on," she said slowly; "*what have you done?*"

"I wouldn't tell you," he commenced, half whimpering; "I would have kept it from you before all the world, only you are the only person who can save me, Eve."

"Go on," she repeated; "don't keep me in suspense. Go on."

"Well, you know about old Todson's bill? I told you I had borrowed the money. So I did, and I fully intended to pay it back some day, only I didn't get it from the money-lenders."

"Who from, then?" said Evelyn, in a strained voice.

"Well, I—I—borrowed it from the firm. Of course I didn't ask them, because it would have been no good; but last week I was sent into uncle's office, and his cheque-book was on the desk, and so—and so—"

"*You forged his name!*" cried Evelyn, in a tone of incredulous horror.

"Well, you can hardly call it 'forging,' when the money is to be all mine," said Will Caryll weakly; "anyway, I didn't see the excessive sin of drawing a few weeks' salary in advance, and so I passed the cheque into the bank, and it would have been all right if it hadn't been for the confounded interference of old Gamble."

"Has *he* found it out?" cried Evelyn.

"Every body has found it out. The whole firm know it by this time. Old Gamble's the cashier, you know, and he

has a brother in the bank. What they saw about me to raise their suspicions I can't imagine, but this morning his brother sent for him, and they called in the passed cheques and picked out mine at once—at least so Sam Godwin, who's in the accountant's office, told me; and then Gamble came back, and had a long confab with Uncle Roger, and they sent out for a policeman. I didn't wait to hear any more. I ran into the backyard and climbed over the wall, and came home as fast as I could, and got out on the roof, and have stayed there ever since, and precious hot I have been, and hungry too, I can tell you. But has any one been after me yet, Eve? Have the police made inquiries here? Does Miss Rayne know anything about it?"

"No, no! no one has been—no one has said anything," she answered, in a low voice.

"Then, perhaps, uncle is not going to prosecute me! Perhaps he will refuse on account of the family name, and of my being his heir; eh, Eve?"

But Eve made no reply.

"Why don't you speak to me?" continued Will impatiently. "I don't think much of your affection if you can't give a fellow a little comfort in his trouble."

But she could not speak. She was weeping as if her heart would break. All the misery and the danger of the crime of which her cousin had been guilty impressed itself so forcibly upon her mind, that in imagination she already saw him working out his sentence for felony in a convict's prison, and stamped for evermore with the indelible seal of shame; and then the awful feeling of distaste towards him which it gave her—*he*, whom a few short hours ago she had been ready to regard as a model of all that was good and lovable. She had felt herself edging away from his side as he made his repulsive confession, until she remembered that he had said she was his only friend, and love and pity triumphed over her first disgust. But oh! the sin and the shame of it! She buried her face in the bed-pillow, and wept convulsively.

"Oh, Will!" she sobbed, "how could you do it—how *could* you do it?"

"Hush! don't make such a row," he exclaimed in alarm; "if you rouse the others, Eve, as sure as I am a man I'll throw myself from this window and smash to pieces before your eyes. It's cruel of you to make me run such a risk as this."

Eve stifled her weeping by a powerful effort at once.

"I won't cry any more, Will, indeed I won't. But tell me, what do you intend to do?"

"I don't know. I've come to you to tell *me*. One thing's certain, I must keep in hiding till the officers are tired of looking for me, and then I must get away somewhere. Is the punishment very hard for—for writing another person's name, Eve?"

"It's transportation," she whispered, with white lips.

Will Caryll turned deadly pale.

"But you'll help me—won't you, Eve?" he said tremblingly. "You swore by your mother's grave that you would."

"I have not forgotten it, Will; but you must give me time to think. Do you believe the roof is safe? If the house should be searched, I should think the trap-door would be the first place they would suspect."

"Then what am I to do?"

"Lie down on the bed and go to sleep, and leave me to puzzle it out, Will. You will be quite safe, for I shall watch by your side and wake you before the others are stirring. And you may not have a bed to-morrow-night, poor darling—there is no saying what may happen to prevent it—so take your rest whilst you can."

She made him take off his boots, and lie down in his clothes, and covered him as tenderly as though he had been an infant.

"Oh, Eve! I don't know what I should do without you," he whimpered, as she kissed the tears off his face, and bid God bless and keep him. And in a few minutes he had sunk off to sleep, as if nothing had happened to disturb his slumbers; whilst Eve sat by the open window, gazing up into the starry sky, with a heart full of dread and despair. What was to become of him? That was the sole question that filled her mind, and which she found it impossible to answer. But here the budding powers of her brain made themselves apparent. She reviewed her position, and collected her forces, and arranged her tactics as methodically as a general about to do battle with the foe. And what a foe it was she found herself arrayed against—the exposure, which must ruin her cousin's career for ever in this world, without hope or chance of remedy. As Eve thought of the crime he had committed, and the weakness

of which he had been guilty, she shuddered visibly, and felt as if she never wished to look on him again; but the next moment the grand womanly compassion with which her breast was overflowing welled to the surface, and she longed to take him in her arms like a little infant, and run far away with him to a place of safety. But what she had to do in this extremity was to act, and not to dream.

When six o'clock struck on that Sunday morning, and the little world of Liverpool began to stir, she went up to the bed, and kissed the fair, flushed face of William Caryll into consciousness.

"Will," she whispered, as he sprung up into a sitting posture, and stared about him, "it is morning—you will have to go into hiding again. But listen to me, dear. I have been thinking all night what is best to be done, and I have decided to go and speak to Uncle Caryll."

"You won't tell him I am here?" he cried, clutching her arm.

"No, no! How can you imagine such a thing. Of course I must behave as if I had heard nothing. But I will say you have not been home all night, and ask if he knows the reason. Then he will tell me the story, and I shall learn exactly what he means to do. Until we know this, Will, I don't see how we can act for the best. Perhaps Sam Godwin only said it to frighten you, and uncle doesn't intend to prosecute after all."

A look of relief came into Will's face.

"I shouldn't wonder. I was in such a funk I hardly understood what he said. What a clever girl you are, Eve, to think of it. But won't you be afraid to encounter Uncle Roger? He's an awful old bear."

She sighed.

"Yes, I *am* afraid—that is, a little—but if it is necessary, Will, it must be done. And now, dear, you must go back to the roof. Aunt Maria is generally stirring about seven, and she might come up here. But put a wet towel inside your hat, Will, to keep the sun off your head, and take a blanket to lie on. Perhaps you will be able to sleep on the leads, and no one can see you from the street because of the parapet. And I will bring you up what I can save from breakfast without Aunt Maria seeing me."

"Will she let you go to see Uncle Caryll, Eve? He lives at 24 Birkenhead Square."

"Of course I shall say nothing to her about it; but I don't think there will be any difficulty. She always lets me go to church by myself if I wish it, and I can pretend to be going with Louisa Marsh."

She sighed again heavily.

"Oh, Will! how I wish there was no need of pretence. It does cut my heart so."

"But there *is*, you see—great need—so it's no use sighing over it," said Will, as he prepared to mount on a chair and climb through the trap-door; "and mind you bring me some breakfast, Eve, for I'm positively starving."

"I will—you know I will. I would go without any myself sooner than you should fast any longer. But lie close and keep quiet, Will, whatever you do."

She fastened the inner bolt of the trap-door as soon as he had disappeared through it, and washed and dressed herself in a tremendous hurry. She was in such a fright lest Miss Rayne should walk into her room and observe anything unusual in its appearance. She shook up her bed and re-made it, and set everything in apple-pie order, giving many a wistful glance meanwhile at the closed trap-door that hid her lover. Her aunt awaked, as she had feared, earlier than usual. Will Caryll's defalcations of the night before had weighed upon her mind, and cut short her slumbers. In a very little while her voice was heard calling up the stairs,—

"Evelyn! Evelyn! Did that boy come home last night?"

"*I* didn't let him in, aunt," replied Eve, over the banisters; "no one entered the house after I came to bed."

Miss Rayne mounted the staircase, as if to make sure, and opened the door of young Caryll's untenanted room.

"It's disgraceful!" she ejaculated; "a lad of his age—only twenty in May—stopping out all night in this manner. Where has he been, I should like to know? Such disreputable proceedings are enough to give the house a bad name. But I shall write to Mr. Caryll on the subject. Either he must put a stop to it, or William Caryll must go. I wonder, Evelyn, you don't see it in the same light as I do."

"I *do* see it in the same light, auntie," said Eve gravely. "I think it is very wrong of Will, and you are quite right in forbidding it."

"Well, well, child, you are always good and amenable," replied Miss Rayne mollified, "and I only wish your cousin would take pattern by you. Don't worry about him any more. He's safe enough, I'll lay. Bad money is sure to come back on one's hands. But come down; run and get the breakfast ready. I'll talk to Mr. Gamble about this when he's had his—"

"Aunt," said Evelyn, as they entered the kitchen together, "don't you think it would be better to leave the discussion of Will's behavior till to-morrow? It can't be a pleasant subject to Mr. Gamble, and this is Sunday, you know, the day of peace and rest. Unless he begins it, I wouldn't bother Mr. Gamble about our own troubles to-day."

"Lor, child, you talk like an old woman of fifty! However, you're right for all that, and we should try to put all our worries on one side on Sunday. And I think Mr. Gamble is going over to Waterloo, so I dare say I shouldn't have had the opportunity. Don't take that loaf for toast, my dear. There's a staler one in the cupboard. And I'd like a little boiled bread and milk myself. I've had the toothache half the night! I was nearly coming upstairs to ask you to get me a poultice."

Evelyn shuddered as she thought of the risk Will had run, but Miss Rayne saw no change in her countenance.

"I'm half afraid I sha'n't get to church this morning," she went on presently, "for they leave all the doors and windows open this warm weather, and there's always the fear of a draught. But you can go as usual, of course, Evelyn, my dear."

"Thank you, auntie."

"And now, if the water boils, just make a cup of tea for me and yourself before you go on with the breakfast. You look very white, child; do you feel ill?"

"Oh, no; I am quite well—only a little tired with sitting up so late. But you shall have the tea in a few minutes, auntie."

Miss Rayne walked away to dust the sitting-rooms, and superintend Sarah's operations; and Evelyn, having carried in her tea, poured her own share into a clean bottle, and placed it in a drawer.

"Take a cup yourself, child!" called out Miss Rayne from the front parlor; "for you look as if it would do you good."

She was really fond of her niece, although she considered it her duty to look strictly after her; and she plied her so liberally with food that morning, that Evelyn had a good supply to carry to her prisoner on the roof by the time she went up to put on her walking things.

"Will," she cried, when she had locked the door and unbolted the trap; "my poor Will, here is your breakfast; and now I am going as fast as I can to Uncle Caryll's, to bring you back news of what he intends to do."

Will dared not answer for fear of being heard from below, so he only nodded his head as he received the parcel of food and bottle of tea, and commenced at once to demolish them. And Evelyn put on her Sunday frock, and hat and mantle, and set out tremblingly for her uncle's house. She had heard such terrible accounts of Mr. Caryll that she pictured him to herself as some ogre, ready to snap one's head off for the least word, and she would sooner have faced a wild beast than dared him in his den. But it was no time to think of her own fears. Will's safety and well-doing were at stake, and it was imperatively necessary that she should find out how far the firm were aware of his short-comings, and what they meant to do concerning them. Perhaps—if he would listen to her—she might persuade her uncle to pardon him this time, and take him back into his office. But, even if he did so, Evelyn felt in her heart that something had gone out of her life that could never be replaced there.

CHAPTER VII.

UNCLE ROGER.

NUMBER 24 Birkenhead Square was a large and imposing mansion in appearance, but very dull. Eve thought, as she came in sight of it, that it looked more like a hospital or a prison than a private house, it had such begrimed and dusty windows, shaded by wire blinds, and with no lace curtains or bright colors to make them homelike and pleasant. As she glanced up, she wondered how any one who owned Mount Eden and such a lot of money could live in so gloomy a place. Many other people besides

Eve had wondered the same, and called Mr. Roger Caryll stingy, and a miser, for sticking to commerce to amass more wealth, when he could not spend what he possessed already. But they did not understand the working of the merchant's heart. He, too, thought of Mount Eden, and how happy he had once been there, and how all the happiness had vanished like a dream, and his soul sickened as he remembered it. Liverpool, with its bustling, dirty streets, and the dark office for day, and the dull, empty, house for night time, suited him better now than all the sunshine and the flowers of Mount Eden. He could bear them better. They kept him brooding, but the other would have driven him mad. For his was a sad life-history. He had once been a poor clerk in a counting-house, too poor to dream of marrying the woman of his choice, from whom he had been forced to part, with many tears, in order to accept a situation in the West Indies. But Fortune had unexpectedly smiled on him, and after several years' hard work and absence, he had returned home a rich man, to find his old love (contrary to the usual custom) both faithful and free, and himself in a position to reward her fidelity.

They had married, and for a while were perfectly happy. Mr. Caryll's good luck continued. His shillings seemed to have the most marvellous faculty for turning themselves into pounds, and he moved from one house to another, until he occupied a palatial residence in Liverpool. By this time he had become the senior partner in the firm of Caryll, Tyndal & Masters, timber merchants. There was only one thing wanting to complete his happiness—an heir to inherit his wealth. At last that came also. When they had given up all hope of possessing such a blessing, a son was born to Mr. and Mrs. Caryll, and in the plenitude of his pride and felicity, the father purchased the magnificent estate of Mount Eden in Hampshire, and built the house which now stood thereon. It was to be the marriage portion—so he used to say—of his beloved son. His wife and he would continue to occupy it till that happy occasion, and then they would vacate in favor of their little Hugh. But when the Carylls seemed to have reached the zenith of their happiness and success, the tide of luck turned, and misfortune commenced to flow in upon them instead. Is it not often so in this world of

disappointment and trouble? The cup that is raised to our lips is too often like the cup of Tantalus—filled, but to baffle our efforts to reach it. Mr. Caryll's misfortunes began with the death of his wife. The faithful woman who had loved him throughout their hopeless separation died in giving birth to a still-born child, when Hugh was about five years old. Mr. Caryll never recovered the shock. Her last word and her last look had been for him, but the remembrance only added to his grief. Why had God taken away the light of his eyes at one stroke, and spared the wealth which became as dross in his sight without her? He went on living, it is true, but his existence had lost its chief aim, and his only consolation lay in the nurture of his little son. He was still piling up riches. Each ship he chartered brought him home a golden freight, and he had more money than he knew what to do with. Many women would have been glad to step into the late Mrs. Caryll's shoes, but the widower never dreamt of its being possible to marry again. All was to be for Hugh. Hugh was to succeed his father as head of the mercantile firm in Liverpool that bore their name, and Mr. Caryll determined to initiate his son in all the duties of so responsible a position. For this purpose he took the boy from school at sixteen years old, and, moving from Mount Eden to Liverpool, placed him in his counting-house. But Hugh had been sadly spoiled. The routine, work, and close confinement to the office chafed his nervous and excitable temperament; he missed the free life he led in the country; and, tempted by some wild companions of his own age, he ran away to sea without a word of warning, and broke his father's heart. Not but what Mr. Caryll would have brought him back again at any cost and granted him his heart's desire—had the boy lived. But, before the merchant ship in which he sailed came back to port, the news arrived that poor, wilful Hugh had been drowned by the upsetting of a boat in the surf in the Bay of Callao.

This second blow at his affections completely prostrated poor Mr. Caryll. His face became lined and puckered, his figure bent, and his hair white as snow. His speech and manner, too, were altered. He had always been a firm and decided character, but he now degenerated into being stern and rough, which had made Will liken him to a bear. At sixty years of age he looked like an old man of eighty.

Still, he remained cognisant of the duties dependant on him as the owner of so vast a property. His wife and child were gone, but others remained to benefit by his possessions, and after a while he began to look about him, and interest himself more in his relations than he had hitherto done. His family was a small one. He had had a brother and a sister,—now both dead,—but each had left a child behind without any visible means of subsistence. His nephew, William Caryll, became Mr. Caryll's first care. The lad's mother had married again, and moved into the country, and, after some difficulty, he found him in some obscure situation in a draper's house in London, and brought him up to Liverpool and put him in Hugh's place in his office. And how Will Caryll had requited his uncle's kindness has already been told.

There was something of heroic fortitude in the feeling with which Evelyn Rayne approached the door of the house in Birkenhead Square. Her uncle was a stranger to her. He had never even taken the trouble to ask to see her since the day when she had paid him a visit, clinging to her mother's gown. On her own account she never could have ventured into his presence, but fear for Will made her as bold as a lion. So she mounted the dingy steps that led to the melancholy-looking mansion, and rung the hall-bell. A man-servant in plain clothes answered it. He was an elderly man, and not at all smart, but he looked eminently respectable. He seemed very much surprised to see Evelyn standing there, and he asked her rather sharply what she required.

"I want to see Mr. Caryll, please."

"You can't see him to-day ; it's Sunday."

"I know that, but my business is very particular. Will you tell him that his niece, Miss Rayne, wishes to speak to him?"

"I'm sure I beg your pardon, Miss. Please walk in, and I'll tell Mr. Caryll you're here. But it's very seldom he'll see any one on a Sunday."

At this moment, however, a sharp, gruff voice called out from the dining-room,—

"Who's that, Barnes?"

And a sudden courage, born of despair, made Evelyn Rayne start forward to the open door, exclaiming,—

"It's I, Uncle Roger—Evelyn, your niece. Oh, do let me speak to you!"

Mr. Caryll was seated at his breakfast-table, looking very rough and unkempt. He was unshorn; his white hair was tossed about in some disorder; and he wore a dark-grey flannel dressing-gown. But as he caught sight of Evelyn Rayne, he leapt from his chair and grasped her by the arm, regarding her fixedly in the face the while.

"You—you—" he gasped—"you are Evelyn Rayne—poor Mary's child?"

"Yes," replied Evelyn, frightened at his manner; "but don't be angry with me, uncle, I have only come to speak to you for a moment."

Mr. Caryll relaxed his grasp, and tottered back to his chair.

"I'm not angry, child," he answered, and then he covered his face with his hands, and muttered, "So like—so *very* like!"

Eve did not know whom she was like, unless it was her dead mother; but she no longer felt afraid of her uncle. By-and-bye she ventured to speak again.

"You will think it very strange my coming here, I am afraid, when you have never asked me, uncle; but we are in great distress at home, and I came to you for information."

"All right, sit down. What is it you have to say?"

Evelyn took a chair, but Mr. Caryll did not look at her again, but listened with his head leaning on his hand.

"Will has not been home since yesterday morning, uncle. Auntie and I sat up till twelve o'clock last night to let him in, but he never came, and we are frightened. Can you tell us where he is?"

"Oh! he's not been home, hasn't he?" remarked Mr. Caryll, from behind the shelter of his hand. "He's afraid to show his face there, as well he may be! Likely enough he'll never be heard of again, and lucky for him if he isn't."

"But, sir, what has he done?" inquired Evelyn, with a troubled face. "Is anything wrong, that you should speak of Will like that?"

"*Wrong!* Everything's wrong. The boy's an ungrateful scamp, that I feel ashamed to have befriended. I took him from serving behind the counter of a button-shop in St. Paul's Churchyard, and put him in a position in my office, where he might have risen to anything—*anything;* and he has requited my goodness by first robbing the firm, and then bolting from the consequences of his crime."

"Oh, uncle, he didn't *rob* you, surely?" cried Evelyn.

"He did worse, Evelyn. He stole my cheques and forged my name. He hasn't even cleverness enough to be a good thief. He did the job so clumsily that a child might have detected the fraud. But he will meet with his deserts yet."

"Will they send the detectives after him?" asked the girl, in a low voice of horror.

"Most certainly they will. The forged cheque was in the hands of the police last night, and if to-day were not Sunday, Master William Caryll would be in their hands by this time. As it is, they must wait till to-morrow. But they'll have him locked up by to-morrow night—you may depend upon that."

"But oh, uncle, will you not spare him?" cried Evelyn, leaving her seat and approaching Mr. Caryll's chair. "He is very young, you know, and this is his first offence."

"No, my dear, it is not his first offence. He has stolen postage stamps and loose change over and over again, but I hoped he would take warning by what was said to him. But this is far more serious. He has committed a felony."

"I can't think how he can have done it," said Evelyn, with the tears in her eyes. "He must have been mad; and I am sure he is sorry for it now. Oh, sir! Oh, uncle! won't you let him off this time, and give him one more chance? Think how his whole future will be blasted if you prosecute him for this terrible offence."

Mr. Caryll shoved his spectacles down upon his nose, and peered at her curiously through them.

"What's your interest in this young man?" he asked.

Evelyn blushed like a rose.

"He is my cousin," she answered, looking down, "and he has lived with us now for two years. It would be terrible for both Aunt Maria and me if Will were to be put in prison—or transported. It would affect our name, as well as yours, uncle."

"I know that; but I can't cheat the law for my own convenience. Besides, the matter is out of my hands. It concerns the firm, and Messrs. Tyndal and Masters are resolved to prosecute him on their own account. Such a young miscreant must be made an example of, or we shall have all the clerks in the office embezzling and forging."

Evelyn did not answer him this time. She was weeping silently.

"I'm sorry for *you*, child—that is, if you like the lad," resumed Mr. Caryll presently, "and if the matter had concerned myself alone, I might have granted your request. But no one could save him from his just punishment now. We have given him up to the law, and the law must take its course. There's no help for it."

"And when they find him, they will put him in prison," sobbed Evelyn.

"Decidedly, and then transport him," replied Mr. Caryll; "and, after all, I think it's the best thing they can do, for he'll never be any good in England—you may take my word for that. Did Miss Rayne send you to me?"

"No, sir. I came of myself."

"Because you thought I could save him?"

"Because I thought you would tell me where he is, uncle."

"Well, I don't know, Evelyn, and I don't want to know. If he's in Liverpool, he'll be in custody to-morrow, there's no doubt of that. And I don't think he's worth crying over either. He's a scamp that's worth no honest girl's tears. How old are you?"

"Seventeen, sir."

"And have you ever been to school?"

"Oh, yes. Aunt Maria always sent me till last year. But now I stay at home, and help her with the lodgers."

"And it's not very pleasant work, I expect?"

"I don't mind it, uncle. Auntie has been very good to me. It is my duty to help her as far as I can."

"That's a good girl. Well, dry your eyes and go home, and don't waste any more tears over your Cousin William. Perhaps I may see your aunt and you, after a few days, but I have no more time to talk to you now."

And taking up his Sunday papers, Mr. Caryll buried his face from view in them.

"Very well, uncle. Good morning," said Evelyn meekly, as she turned away.

As she closed the door behind her, and stepped into the hall, she was met by Barnes.

"You've quite upset the master, Miss, I can hear it in the tone of his voice," he said, "by your likeness to Master Hugh. Well, you *are* like him, there's no denying it. *I* never seen such a likeness in my life," he continued, as he let her out at the front door. But Evelyn scarcely heeded

his remark. Her heart was too full of Will. She only wanted to get away somewhere, and think over what she had heard. She *would* save him, she kept on repeating to herself. Whatever the firm or the police might do, she would save Will at the risk of her own life. The first public square she came to, she walked in and sat down on a bench, and put her head down between her two hands, and thought hard—*hard*. What was the best thing to do? Yet, when it was time to walk home to the two o'clock dinner, she had arrived at no satisfactory conclusion. But when she handed up to Will the food she had managed to secrete for him, there was a little note in the parcel.

"Dear Will," it ran, "keep up your spirits. I am turning over schemes in my mind for your escape, and I am sure I shall succeed. I will tell you all to-night.—EVE."

She had an extra source of annoyance that afternoon from the fact of her aunt having become acquainted with the story of Will's wickedness through Mr. Gamble. The two had spent the whole morning in denunciation of the lad's conduct; and Miss Rayne repeated it all as news to her niece on her return home. But she was not satisfied with Evelyn's reception of it.

"Upon my word, I have no patience with you," she exclaimed at last. "Here am I telling you that we have been harboring a young man no better than a murderer under our roof, and you look as stolid as if he'd done nothing at all. Why, we might all have been murdered in our beds. A lad who'll forge his master's name would do anything. But he doesn't enter *my* doors again, Evelyn Rayne. If William Caryll comes knocking for admittance here, and you let him in, you'll both go out together. Don't forget that. But he's too cunning to try it. Mr. Gamble says he's most likely hiding in some of those low places near the river, and the police will have him safe enough by to-morrow evening. The young wretch."

"Poor Will," said Evelyn softly.

"Ah! *poor* Will, indeed! Poor Mr. Caryll, you mean, who's lost fifty pounds and more by his wicked behavior; but there, I believe you'd pity Will if he was hanging on the gallows. I've no patience with you, Evelyn. Your heart's a deal too soft to go through the world with, and it'll bring you to trouble yet. Are you going to afternoon church?"

"No, aunt. I'm tired. I'd rather stay at home and read."

"Ah, well; read, or do anything rather than waste your time thinking of that scamp," said Miss Rayne, as she left the room.

But Evelyn thought of nothing else, and by night-time she had matured her plans. When all the house was asleep, and she ventured to let Will enter her room again by the trap-door, she whispered to him what had occurred during her interview with their uncle. The lad's look of hopeless despair was a picture.

"It's all over," he gasped; "they will trap me, as sure as a gun, and I shall be transported for life. Oh, Eve, what shall I do? What *shall* I do?"

"Hush! hush! dear Will. Don't cry, or you will upset my fortitude as well. Listen to me, dear. *I* am going to save you!"

"You, Eve! But how?"

"It will not be an agreeable thing to do, I know, but you must do it if you want to escape. You must put on a set of my clothes."

"Nonsense; they will never fit me."

"*I* will make them fit you. I have a dark winter suit in my box, and I am going to sit up all night and alter it. And then you must change the color of your hair."

"How can I do that?"

"You have often laughed at poor auntie for dyeing her grey hair brown. It is lucky for you now that she does so. I have got the bottle out of her room, and I am going to put it all over your head at once."

Will put his hands up to shield his golden locks.

"Oh, bother, I can't have that; you'll spoil my hair!" he exclaimed, in his conceit.

Eve looked at him with pitiful surprise.

"And can you think of your hair at a moment like this? Why, Will, if they take you they'll shave it all off."

His face lengthened.

"All right, then; go ahead, and get it over. But what am I to do next?"

"My proposal is this," she whispered, as she began to damp his hair with the brown dye; "there are emigrant ships lying in the docks, Will, and two of them sail to-morrow. I have some money for you—fifteen pounds—

which I got by selling my mother's jewellery, and I think your best plan will be to walk out of the house boldly as soon as it is light, and make your way down to the docks, and take your passage, as a girl, to America."

"But they'll ask my name," said Will in a vacant manner.

"Oh, call yourself by any name," cried Eve impatiently —"Ann Jones, or Ellen Brown—what does it matter? but be very careful not to betray yourself. The officers may come on board to search the vessel,—they most likely will,—but if you play your part well, I think you will cheat them. The great thing, Will, in a case like this is to be *bold*. People take you so much for what you seem. Mr. Gamble says they all believe you to be in hiding near the river. They won't suspect you of walking abroad in daylight. They think you would be too much afraid. And you must go aboard the biggest ship. There are two ready to sail. I walked down to the quay, after I had seen uncle this morning, to look at them. There's the 'Anna Maria' and the 'Nuremberg Castle.' You must go by the 'Nuremberg.' You know where the tickets are sold? It won't cost you more than six pounds; and if any one asks you any questions about yourself, say your brother's out in New York, and sent the money home for you to join him. But say as little as you need, Will, till you be well out to sea, for talking is dangerous, and you might make a slip of the tongue, and betray yourself."

So Eve rambled on, as she dyed his hair, and combed it till it was dry.

"It's lucky your hair curls," she continued presently, "because it makes you look more like a girl. You'll make a prettier girl than I do, Will; and when you get to America, and put on your own things again, the dye will soon wear off your hair, and leave it the right color again."

"I'd better take my own things in a bundle, Eve."

"Oh no! that would be far too dangerous. Supposing any one saw them? But I'll send them after you, Will, as soon as I safely can, addressed in your own name to the New York Customs House, and you can go and fetch them—say in a fortnight's time. And, meanwhile, you must buy yourself a suit on arrival."

"Fancy your selling your mother's trinkets to help me on! It was awfully good of you, upon my word, Eve."

"Don't speak of it, Will; I did it in hopes of getting enough to satisfy Mr. Todson; and at first, when I found you had paid him, I felt sorry—but now I am very, *very* glad. What should we have done in this strait without money?"

"What, indeed? You have been my savior, Eve. I shall never forget it. What can I do to show my gratitude?"

"Lie down on the bed, Will, and have a good sleep, whilst I prepare your clothes. You have a trying day before you to-morrow. Get all the rest you can to-night."

He lay down, as he had done the night before, looking so strangely unlike himself with his altered hair, and was soon fast asleep.

Then Eve drew out her work-basket and her winter dress, and sat down and stitched for several hours, lengthening the skirt, enlarging the band, and letting out the bodice to suit her cousin's larger frame. By the time the day had dawned, she had everything ready for him, with a few articles for change put up in a bundle, and the precious fifteen sovereigns in a purse. And then, before she waked the slumbering youth, she knelt down beside him and offered up a prayer from her heart for his preservation. She was bearing up so bravely for his sake, that she did not know how deeply his danger and their approaching separation were eating into her very soul.

"Wake up, Will," she whispered presently, as she gently shook him by the arm, "wake up. Five has just struck by the town clock. I am going into the next room till you have washed and dressed yourself, and when you want me, knock very softly on the wall, and I shall hear you and come back again."

She slipped out of the room without her shoes as she spoke, and went into Will's empty apartment, whence she listened, with a heart beating with fear, for any sounds of disturbance amongst the rest of the household. But all went smoothly. Will washed and dressed himself, and presently his tap upon the intervening wall brought Eve back again to find him struggling with the buttons of her dress. But he was not so awkward as might have been imagined. He had often posed as a woman for amateur theatricals, and knew something of the intricacies of a female wardrobe. When he was fully equipped, he looked

very much what he professed to be. His delicate features lent themselves to his disguise, and his brown hair effectually spoilt his likeness to Will Caryll. When he had placed a dark brown straw hat over his curls, he made a very personable girl.

"Oughtn't I to have a veil?" he asked her.

"No, Will, it would only rouse suspicion. Girls who go out as emigrants don't wear veils. But pin this shawl over your shoulders. I'm afraid it will be very warm, but it hides your figure, and you will find it useful on board ship. And here is the money, dear, and some clean linen in this bundle. And now, Will, it must be a bold stroke for liberty. I will go down first, to make sure that auntie is still in bed, and then I will return for you." She walked downstairs as she spoke, passing her aunt's door, and those of the lodgers, but everything was still as death. "They are all asleep," she said, on returning, "and you will not take two minutes to descend the stairs, and I shall open the hall door for you at once. Walk boldly out, Will, and get some breakfast at a coffee-house before you go down to the quay. I dare not give you any here, it would be too dangerous."

"All right," said Will Caryll, "I am ready."

But here the girl's fortitude gave way, and she turned a piteous face towards him.

"I must say good-bye to you here," she moaned. "Oh, Will, my darling, shall we ever see one another again?"

The tears rushed to his eyes also. He folded Eve in his arms, and they wept silently together.

"Of course we shall," he whispered presently; "I shall be all right by-and-bye, Eve, and then I shall send money home for you to come out and join me. For you won't forget that we are promised to each other—will you—and that we are to be husband and wife?"

"Never—never," she sobbed.

"You are mine—as much as if I had married you, Eve—I shall always consider that; and if I don't come back for years, I shall expect to find you waiting for me, as I shall for you. Will you swear to be faithful to me?"

"Oh, yes! I swear it!"

And if uncle comes round (as I daresay he will, after a while) and sends for me home again, or if he dies and leaves me Mount Eden, we are to share it together, aren't we, Eve?"

"Yes, dear, but just now you must think only of yourself and your safety. You will be careful, won't you, Will?—and when you get work in America, you will keep very very straight, for my sake as well as your own?"

"Of course I will, Eve! This has been all a beastly mistake, I assure you. If it hadn't been for that interfering impertinent old brute Gamble, I should have paid it all back again, and no one would have been the wiser."

To the last, and even in the crisis of his danger, Will Caryll remained the same—obstinate, foolish, and self-assured—and yet Eve loved him.

"God bless you! God keep you, my darling!" she sobbed, as she kissed him again and again. "It would be selfish to keep you longer—it might imperil your safety. I have a thousand more things to say to you, but they all seem to end up with God bless you. But you will write to me, Will, as soon as you have arrived in New York?"

"Oh, yes; of course I will write to you."

"Then one more kiss, and let us part."

The parting kiss was exchanged very solemnly, and then Eve opened the bedroom door again and went downstairs, Will Caryll treading with her, step by step, so that their descent sounded like that of one. As they passed Miss Rayne's door, they had a fright.

"Eve!" she called from her bed, "is that you?"

"Yes, aunt," Eve replied, but she did not arrest her footsteps.

"What are you up so early for?"

"I have a headache. I couldn't sleep," returned her niece, who, with Will Caryll, by this time had gained the hall.

"Well, as you *are* up, make me a cup of tea, my dear. I have the toothache again, terribly."

"All right, auntie. You shall have it as soon as the kettle boils," said Eve, as with a face as white as death from the suspense she had gone through, she unbolted the hall door, and threw it open to the morning air. The street in which they lived was empty from one end to the other.

She pointed silently to the pavement, as though to bid Will go. He glanced about fearfully, on the look-out for a policeman.

"Be brave!" she whispered, "it is your only chance.

Go at once, and get clear of this house as soon as possible."

And then he walked away, awkwardly enough, with his bundle in his hand, and Eve gazed after him for a moment in agony, thinking that every one must detect his sex at the first glance. But at last he turned the corner without one backward look, and she closed the door upon him, and leant her head against it in a kind of dumb and hopeless pain.

"Eve! Eve!" called out Miss Rayne again; "*when* am I to have that tea?"

Eve started from her stupor. Had she been leaning there a minute or an hour? She could not tell. But she staggered to the kitchen and lit the fire, and put on the kettle, and made the tea, and carried it up to her aunt's room.

All the excitement and the suspense were over now, and the reaction was setting in. Eve hardly knew what she thought, or hoped, or wished for as she stood by Miss Rayne's side, with the cup of tea in her hand.

"Well! you *have* been a time," grumbled Aunt Maria; "I began to think you were making the wood and the coals. And how white you look, too! Have you seen a ghost downstairs, or have you been out of your bed all night? I expect you lie awake reading trashy novels and burning my candles, Evelyn Rayne, and I won't have it, and so I warn you! Now, tell me the truth. What have you been doing to yourself?"

"Nothing, auntie. But I have such a queer feeling in my head," "said the girl faintly, and the next minute she had fallen flat down on the floor, beside Miss Rayne's bed.

"Good gracious!" exclaimed the old lady, as she upset the tea all over herself, and scrambled out of bed to her assistance, "Mercy on us! If she hasn't fainted!"

CHAPTER VIII.

AN IMMENSE SURPRISE.

EVELYN did not hear the last of that unfortunate fainting fit for a long time, mingled with the subject of Will Caryll's extraordinary disappearance. It rung in her ears for days afterwards.

"Such an unheard-of thing," Miss Rayne would exclaim, "that you should faint. You've never fainted in your life before, that I ever heard of, and here, on the very day that that good-for-nothing fellow, Will Caryll, disappears, you must needs tumble down by my bedside like a fine lady with the vapors; it is very annoying of you, Evelyn. I don't know what Sarah can have thought of it, 'Lor,' she says to me, 'here's Miss Eve fainted straight off, and Mr. William hasn't been in his bed all night.' Such disgraceful proceedings! They really make me quite ashamed."

"I'm very sorry, aunt," replied Evelyn, in a weak, low voice, "but I told you the reason. I have been sitting up so late at night the last week, and I was over tired."

"Yes; sitting up to let that young scamp in, so that I shouldn't hear of his misdoings! You encouraged him, Evelyn, in all his wickedness. I consider half his crimes should be laid at your door."

"Oh, don't say that," cried the girl in tears. "I would have saved him from them at any cost, but I didn't know of them until it was too late."

"Well, don't cry, my dear, for he's not worth a single tear. Didn't I always say that he reminded me of Hogarth's 'Idle Apprentice?' It might have been drawn from Will Caryll. And where can he have hidden himself all this time? That's what beats me. Mr. Gamble says he can't be in Liverpool, for the police have searched high and low, and went on board every ship in the docks. But (as I said) what was the use of that, for I know he hadn't any money on Saturday morning, because he asked me to lend him twopence."

"What ships did they search?" asked Evelyn breathlessly.

"Lor, child, how can I tell you? They haven't found him, more's the pity."

"Perhaps he has gone back to London, auntie."

"How could he get to London without money? That fainting fit has dazed your brain, Evelyn Rayne. Unless, indeed, he's pawned his clothes. I turned out his room this morning, and I found nothing there but a few old collars. He's taken his things with him—the ungrateful scamp!"

"Well, they'd be no use to *us*, auntie," replied Evelyn, who had them safely locked away in her box.

"Perhaps not; but it shows he had it in his mind to run away all along. He was prepared for this, the villain. But a lad who could forge his master's name would be prepared for anything. Mr. Gamble says the police are convinced he is not in Liverpool, neither can they hear anything of him, so they are going to turn their attention to London. And they'll soon catch him *there*. They've got a full description of him, with his fine blue eyes, and his curly, fair hair, and they won't be long running him down, *I* bet. And the sooner he's caught the better, say I. Mr. Gamble said he'll be transported for it, and if he was hung, I shouldn't cry. He's no good in the world, and a deal better out of it."

"Oh, aunt, aunt, you are very hard on him," exclaimed Evelyn; "can't you make some allowance for his youth and his temptations? He has been very wrong, I know that, but he will suffer bitterly for it all his life long."

"And serve him right too," replied Miss Rayne hotly. "Good gracious me, that I should live to hear my own flesh and blood standing up for a forger! Do you understand what forgery is, Evelyn Rayne, and that your fine cousin, William Caryll, is no better than a common thief?"

"Oh, yes! I understand it only too well. But we cannot judge of the extent of a sin until we know all the circumstances attending it."

"Oh, can't we? That's *your* opinion, is it? But I happen to have my own. And I'd like to see Will Caryll in prison to-morrow for defrauding such a good, kind uncle as Mr. Caryll has been to him. And to think he should have passed *you* over—his own sister's child—for

the sake of an ungrateful scamp like that. Well, I hope he'll see the mistake he's made now. Better late than never. Though, if you're going to take to fainting fits, Evelyn Rayne, I don't know that he will gain much by the exchange. Fainting, indeed! I never heard of such nonsense. *I* never fainted in my life, and I don't know by what right you presumed to do so."

"I won't do it again, auntie, I promise you," said Eve earnestly. "And it isn't pleasant either. I felt ill all day afterwards."

"Well, if you'll prevent it for the future, I've nothing more to say on the subject. But you frightened me, my dear, that's the fact, and at my age such things tell."

So ran on Miss Rayne under the excitement of young Caryll's misdeeds. And Monday, and Tuesday, and Wednesday passed without any news being gained of him. Evelyn's heart was singing a hymn of gratitude the while, of which the refrain was, "*He is safe*," for she had read in a local paper of the departure of both the "Anna Maria" and the "Nuremberg Castle," so, in whichever vessel Will had procured a berth, he had left Liverpool, and was on his way to New York. The excitement and the dread of discovery kept her up for the first few days, but as the week wore to its close, and she realized that Will was gone, and there was no more immediate cause for fear, the fact of their separation, and the uncertainty of its duration, bore in upon her mind, and weighed her spirits to the very ground. Everything seemed over. Even the clothes he left behind him had been packed in a parcel and secretly conveyed to the luggage office, and booked for New York Customs House in his name. And then all was gone, except the remembrance of his crime, and the knowledge that it must be a long time before he could venture to show his face in England again. The reaction had a visible effect, both on Evelyn's health and spirits. She mourned the loss of her young lover as though he had been dead, and the burden was all the heavier to bear, because she was ashamed to confess its weight to anyone. But she grew thinner, and sallower, and more lanky, and her big, dark eyes looked like two burnt holes in a blanket in the midst of her yellow face. She did not work less in the daytime, but she went about her business languidly and with trouble; and crying half the night for her absent Will

did not improve the state of affairs. She was not ill-tempered, but she became very silent, and did not seem to care to leave the house; and when her aunt insisted on her taking a walk for the sake of her health, she always went straight to the churchyard to weep on her mother's grave, and renew the vow which she had made there—to be faithful and true to Will forever. He would come back *some* day—she was sure of that, however long it might be first—and when he came, he should find her just the same loving cousin from whom he had parted, even if the hair of both of them was grey.

One afternoon, about three weeks after Will's departure, as she returned home from one of those melancholy visits to the cemetery, she was met at the doorstep by her Aunt Maria, in a great state of flurry and excitement.

"Here you are at last, Evelyn. What a time you've been! I've been watching for you for the last half-hour."

"Oh, aunt, I *am* sorry! But is it late? You told me to stay out till tea-time."

"No, my dear, it's not your fault. It's quite early yet; but I've a surprise for you. *Who* do you think is in the parlor?" continued Miss Rayne, lowering her voice.

Evelyn became as white as a sheet. Could Will have been caught, or returned?

"I cannot guess. Please tell me quickly."

"Your Uncle Roger, and he wants to see *you*."

"*Me?*" ejaculated Evelyn, her spirits sinking as she remembered the interview in Birkenhead Square. "Oh, aunt, you must be mistaken."

"Not at all. I've seen him myself, and he's doing us the honor to take a cup of tea with us. Now, run up and make yourself tidy, and come down as quickly as you can."

Evelyn did not expostulate further. She had been agreeably disappointed by her first view of her uncle, and was not afraid to meet him again. Only she dreaded lest he should have come expressly to discuss poor Will's delinquencies, and try to find out more about him and his mysterious escape. And Evelyn felt that she had rather not be subjected to a cross-examination under the fire of those two keen grey eyes that sparkled under Mr. Caryll's bushy brows. However, she bathed her face and brushed her hair, and descended to the little parlor. If it *had* to be done, it would gain no improvement from delay.

Mr. Roger Caryll, dressed in a complete suit of dark-grey frieze, was occupying their solitary arm-chair, and drinking a cup of tea handed him by Miss Rayne. He looked very old and bent, but not so untidy as he had done in his own house, and his eyes kept on turning expectantly towards the door, whilst he scarcely heard or listened to the running list of compliments with which his hostess was entertaining him. For Miss Rayne was hoping all sorts of good things from this unexpected visit, though she had little idea in what it would really result.

"Good evening, uncle," said Evelyn deferentially, as she entered the room.

She was looking her very worst, poor child, with a pale face and dark rims under her eyes, and clad in a stuff dress of the ugliest shade of brown.

"Holloa! what's the matter? Have you been ill?" exclaimed Mr. Caryll, peering at her through his spectacles.

"Evelyn has *not* been well this last week or two—far from it," replied Miss Rayne; "she wants change of air, I think, and many things that I can't give her, Mr. Caryll, as you must well know, however good my will may be."

She thought that since Mr. Caryll *was* there, she might as well put him in remembrance that he had a niece as well as a nephew.

"Of course—of course—naturally," he said, in answer to her remark, and then he turned to Evelyn. "Well, and so you're poor Mary's child?"

"Indeed she is; and we've always considered her very like her poor dear mother," interposed Miss Rayne. "She's a regular Caryll, isn't she, sir?"

The old man's brow contracted with pain, but he forced himself to look at the girl.

"Yes," he said, after a pause, "you are right. She is a regular Caryll. There was a time when I was very fond of my sister, Miss Rayne."

"Of course, sir, naturally. And I am sure poor Mary honored and respected you to the last day of her life."

"I wish this girl had been a lad, that I might have put her in the place of that young rascal who has just run away from us," continued Mr. Caryll. "It seems hard he should have done so, Miss Rayne, for I am a lonely man now, and have few relations left."

"It was shameful—disgraceful—the basest ingratitude!"

exclaimed Miss Rayne; "and I hope he'll get his deserts, sir."

"Yes, he will repent it more than I shall, you may be sure of that, for I never quite took to the lad. He didn't remind me of my brother a bit. Edward had dark eyes and hair, like Mary and myself, and this girl here. That lad William was the image of his mother. He didn't look like a Caryll to me. However, he's gone, and there's an end of it. He will never be able to show his face in this country again."

"What! *Never?*" cried Evelyn, startled out of her reserve.

"Certainly not—unless he wishes to be arrested for forgery. The warrant is out against him, and will be available at any time of his existence. But don't let us speak of him. I wish to forget that he ever lived, and if I could take the name of Caryll from him I would. But I am growing an old man now, Miss Rayne, and these late events have somewhat shaken me. I have been talking to my partners about quitting the firm. There is no necessity for my remaining in business. I have more money than I shall ever need, and I begin to feel my infirmities. So I have decided to live for the future at my country house. Perhaps you have heard that I have a place in Hampshire called Mount Eden—"

"*Heard*, Mr. Caryll!" exclaimed Miss Rayne enthusiastically, "who has *not* heard of Mount Eden? And once, sir,—years ago—I had the honor to pay you a visit there with my poor brother,—Evelyn's father,—and I have always spoken of it since as a perfect little paradise. Haven't I, Evelyn?"

"Yes, it's a fine place—a very fine place—but it's been shut up for a long time," said Mr. Carlyl, with a deep sigh. "I have not had the courage to occupy it; but I think I am stronger now that my time is so nearly come. So I am going back there very shortly; but it's too big a house for a lonely old man. I shall be lost there by myself, and so I want to take this girl with me, if you make no objection. She seems a good sort of girl to me—sensible and quiet—and she'll look after me, perhaps, and keep me company, and make the house more cheerful. Would you be disposed to part with her?"

Miss Rayne clasped her hands, and raised her eyes in gratitude.

"Oh, Mr. Caryll, it's what I have *prayed* for! I've nearly broken my heart seeing you lavish all your favors upon that worthless Will Caryll, whilst you didn't seem to have a thought for your own sister's child. And she's a good girl, too, though *I* say it; *she'll* never requite you with ingratitude. I've brought her up since she was eight years old, and know every bit of her. And I feel proud, sir, that you should have thought of her name. Evelyn, my dear, why don't you thank your good uncle for his generous offer?"

But Evelyn was standing before them, dazed and bewildered. She had hardly understood Mr. Caryll's meaning, until her aunt replied to it. But now the truth suddenly flashed upon her. She was to leave the little house—dirty and dingy, but which had been her home for nine long years, and held all the sweet memories of her first love and her first grief, and her kind, fidgety aunt, who had never really been harsh or unjust to her, and her mother's grave, and the town where she had hoped to live till Will returned to her—and to go to a strange place, amongst strange people, with this gruff old.uncle, of whom she knew nothing, except that he was Will's enemy—and live in a house where Will would never dare to come for shelter or relief. Oh, no, no! she could not do it.

That was her first impression, and she fell weeping on her aunt's neck and told her so.

"Auntie, I don't want to leave you. Let me stay here. Don't send me away from home."

Miss Rayne was horrified in her turn. She saw all Mr. Caryll's good intentions melting into thin air beneath this ungrateful rejoinder, and Evelyn left on her hands for ever.

"Evelyn, I'm ashamed of you! What will your uncle think of such rudeness? Home, indeed! What home could you find like Mount Eden? And every comfort and luxury into the bargain. Well, I never! I believe you're going to turn out as badly as your cousin, and ingratitude must run in the blood."

"Oh, aunt, I am not ungrateful! Please, sir, turning to her uncle, "don't think so; but I have lived with auntie since I was a little child. She has been like a second mother to me, and if I leave her now, *who* will help her with the housekeeping and the lodgers, and look after her when she grows old and feeble?"

At this appeal Miss Rayne broke down herself, and even Mr. Caryll appeared moved.

"Oh, my dear, my dear," cried the former, throwing herself into a chair and rocking backwards and forwards, "you've been a comfort and a help to me, there's no denying it, and I shall miss you terribly. But it's for your good, Evelyn—it's for your good! I might go any day, and I've nothing to leave behind me except these few old sticks, and you're too young, by a score of years, to keep a house like this by yourself. So, though I shall feel the separation, especially at first, I shall be glad and happy to think you're provided for, and I've no one but myself to think of."

Evelyn looked up, mystified, through her tears.

"Do you mean you will *really* be happier without me, auntie?" she said, in a voice of pain.

"Well, no, my dear—not exactly *that* perhaps—but more comfortable and easy with regard to the future. And you needn't fret about the extra work, Evelyn, because if you go to live with your uncle, I shall be able to keep a second servant, you know, and save myself from everything but the housekeeping. And then, when you come to see me, once in a way, you will find I have all the more time to attend to you, and hear what you may have to say."

Evelyn stood by the table, silent and thoughtful. She saw plainly now that her place would be preferable to her company.

"Well, what do you say?" inquired her uncle presently. "Is it to be or not to be? I don't want to take you to Mount Eden against your will, but I think you will find it is to your advantage. You don't look strong, and the country air will do you good. Do you love the country?"

"Oh, dearly," exclaimed the girl, brightening up; "but I have never seen it since my mother died. I love the flowers, and the trees, and the birds—and everything. I only wanted to stay in Liverpool because it is my home."

"But it should never have been your home, Evelyn Rayne; and it isn't a fit home for you," interrupted her aunt; "nor have I been able, with my poverty, to give you proper advantages, but Mr. Caryll will understand that, and excuse it."

"Certainly, Miss Rayne. I have been called a hard

man, I know, and perhaps I deserve it (for the circumstances of my life have been enough to harden me), but no one has ever said I am injust. If Evelyn decides to come with me—"

"Oh, sir, it *is* decided," interrupted Miss Rayne. "I wouldn't let her refuse such a noble offer for all the world!"

"Nevertheless, she is old enough to know her own mind, and I will not take her away against her will; but should she decide to live with me, I am prepared to make it worth her while. I will engage myself to give her the advantages of finishing her education, and to provide for her maintenance after my death. In return, I ask for her companionship—that is all. If more follows, it must come spontaneously. I have outlived all my natural affections, and know that love can neither be purchased nor cajoled. But I don't think, from what I have seen of my niece, that she will refuse me her duty."

"Oh, she will *love* you, sir, dearly," exclaimed Miss Rayne, with ready assurance.

But Evelyn was silent.

"Evelyn is not so sure of it," remarked Mr. Caryll grimly.

The girl raised her soft eyes, dim with crying, to his face.

"I don't feel as if I was sure of anything, uncle," she said simply; "it is all such a wonderful surprise to me. But I am grateful for your kindness,—indeed I am,—and I will go to Mount Eden with you if you wish me to do so."

"I wish it all the more because you say so little," replied Mr. Caryll; "I have lived long enough to lose all faith in protestations. And if you will try to be happy, my dear, I will try to make you so. Now, the weather is getting very warm, and I am feeling it, and am anxious to be off, so I think of leaving Liverpool in about a week. I suppose you haven't many preparations to make?"

"Oh, sir, the poor child has next to nothing to pack up. She has never been fed nor clothed as befits one of your family, but it is not my fault. With such a limited income—"

"I understand that, madam," replied Mr. Caryll, rather impatiently; "and, of course, from this day all such

responsibility will fall to my share. Be kind enough to get what Evelyn may require for her immediate use," he continued, putting a small packet into her hand, "and let her be ready to accompany me to Mount Eden to-morrow week. When she has been there a month or two she shall write and tell you how she likes it. And if it doesn't turn out according to her expectations, we'll think of some other plan for her. But if she loves a country life, I think she will find plenty of things to interest her there."

"I am *sure* she will," reiterated Aunt Maria.

Mr. Caryll rose with some difficulty from his chair, and prepared to leave them.

"I'm getting very stiff and old," he said, "and I think it is about time I left off work. Well, Evelyn, my dear, will you give me a kiss, and tell me you are not afraid of me?"

"Oh, no, uncle, I am not afraid of you,—not a bit,—and I hope that I may be of use to you."

"Be a comfort to me, my dear—that's what I want most of all—a little *comfort*," said Mr. Caryll sighing. "Well, good evening, Miss Rayne, and let her be ready by the appointed time. I will write you particulars concerning the time of starting."

And with these words he hobbled away. As soon as the door had closed after him, Miss Rayne examined the packet he had left with her.

"Oh, my dear," she cried, "it's twenty pounds! Twenty whole pounds to buy you frocks, and boots, and hats to go down to Mount Eden in! How very, *very* generous. Why, you'll look like a queen. Evelyn, I wish I could see you appreciate your good luck."

"I do appreciate it, auntie, in a measure, but it is too new and sudden. I cannot reconcile myself to the idea yet. Yes, he *is* generous, certainly, but so are you. Twenty pounds is not so much to Uncle Roger as twenty shillings would be to you. And yet you have kept me for nine long years. Oh, auntie, I cannot forget all in a minute how good you have been to me."

And Evelyn's grateful tears overflowed again.

"Well, my dear, you've repaid me over and over; and it's been a pleasure as well as a duty, so say no more about it. My poor brother wouldn't have rested in his grave if I hadn't promised him to look after his little daughter. But

this is such a grand opening for you, Evelyn. If it tore my heart in pieces to part with you, I couldn't reconcile it with my conscience to keep you here. Why, your uncle may leave you Mount Eden and all his fortune. Why not? There's no one to stand between you, and he seems to have taken quite a fancy to you. And if it ever comes to pass, you won't forget your old auntie, I know."

"Never! never!" cried Evelyn, clinging to her.

"Well, that'll be better for me, you see, than ending my days here. So you must try and look on it in that light, and think of the good you may be able to do to others as well as yourself; and you'll soon see it is your duty to do all you can to please and satisfy your uncle."

She *did* think of it. Her thoughts flew forward to the time when Will might return to England, homeless and penniless, and it might be her pride and pleasure to be able to say to him, "Come and share all my good things with me." Indeed, the maintenance which Mr. Caryll had promised to provide for her might prove the best and only means to bring her and her absent cousin together again.

This prospect, together with the beautiful elasticity of a youthful temperament, and the curiosity which she could not help feeling with respect to her new life, soon dried Evelyn's tears, and when the day arrived for her to go with Mr. Caryll, her farewell greeting to her Aunt Maria, though full of warm affection, had no ring of despair in it.

CHAPTER IX.

A LITTLE COMFORTER.

Miss Rayne had not exaggerated when she called Mount Eden a little paradise. Evelyn's first view of it made her hold her breath with surprise. She had endured a long and dusty journey down from Liverpool to St. Mary Ottery, which even the luxury of a first-class carriage, and the pile of illustrated newspapers which Mr. Caryll had bought to beguile the way, had had little power to mitigate the fatigue and inconvenience of. It was far better when they reached the nearest station to Mount Eden, and found a handsome

barouche and pair of horses waiting for them. The cool and balmy air of an August evening in the country soon cooled Evelyn's feverish cheeks, and awakened her interest in the scenes around her. Mr. Caryll had told her nothing of what she might expect to see. He had been very silent all the journey, and she had been too timid to address him without being spoken to, or to rouse him from his semi-sleepy condition. But now she could hardly keep her pleasurable feelings to herself.

The road to Mount Eden lay through country lanes, enclosed on either side by hedges that flowered with the wild rose, and the bramble blossom, and the bind-weed. The pasture-lands were ankle deep in rich grass, on which dappled cows, and sheep, and young horses were luxuriating. Every now and then a laborer going home from work would pass the carriage with a respectful bow, and over the gates of the cottage gardens, gay with marigolds, and scarlet-runners, and holly-hocks, hung the little white-haired, sunburnt children, and shouted as they drove swiftly past. Evelyn's heart began to swell with various emotions. The pleasure of the present mingled with the indelible memory of the past, till she hardly knew whether she should laugh or cry, and she wished her uncle would speak to her, and turn her thoughts into another direction. At last the carriage made a bold sweep, and turned into the park-gates of Mount Eden. The lodge-keeper had heard the wheels long before they were in sight, and was holding open the gates in readiness for their entrance, making profound curtsies the while, that were never noticed Then it was that Evelyn's breath seemed to stop with her surprise, and that she gasped with astonishment at what she saw. The park of Mount Eden was old, although the house was comparatively new, for Mr. Caryll had purchased the ground from a noble family, whose ancestral mansion had been destroyed by fire. The ancient trees were in their fullest glory. Oaks, chesnuts, beeches, elms, and poplars vied with each other to form a leafy shelter that could not be surpassed, whilst from the tall ferns that grew about their roots, the spotted deer (startled by the unusual sound of wheels) rose up, and stared with their innocent, wondering eyes for a moment, before they leapt over all intervening obstacles, and fled to a more secluded shelter. The blue speedwell, and scarlet pimpernel, and flowering

grass fringed the way, whilst here and there a blossoming shrub made a spot of brightness amidst the pleasant gloom.

"Uncle! uncle!" cried Evelyn, forgetting her shyness in the delightful scene around her; "look at the little rabbits —three—four of them—jumping out of that yellow gorse —and oh! what a beautiful bird! Whatever is it?" she continued, as a cock pheasant rose with a loud "whirr," and displayed his glistening plumage of gold, and red, and brown.

She turned towards Mr. Caryll as she spoke, laying her hand upon his arm; but his head had sunk upon his breast, and his face was almost hidden from view. Recollection was too much for him. The sight of Mount Eden, with the familiar paths, through which he had wandered with his dead wife and his poor drowned boy, was cutting his seared heart like a knife. At that moment he doubted the wisdom of ever having returned to the place. Evelyn was alarmed. She feared he must be ill.

"Are you not well, uncle?" she asked: "does your head ache?"

"Not my head, child—my heart. But there, I must shake it off. I have no right to bring you here to share my melancholy. Yes, it is a lovely place, Evelyn, and you will be able to rove through it as you choose. Nothing can harm you here. You will have plenty of room to play in, and companions too. I mustn't cloud your young life because mine is gloomy."

"But, uncle," said Eve timidly, "I have come to be *your* companion. If I may walk with you and wait on you I shall not be dull. And I am too old to *play*," she continued, drawing herself up; "I was seventeen last birthday."

"Seventeen, he repeated sadly, gazing at her. "Seventeen? Yes, that is a great and responsible age, and I was wrong to speak about playing. But how about the education, Evelyn? We mustn't neglect that."

"I am afraid I am very ignorant, uncle, and have a lot to learn. I know nothing about French or music. I can sew, and cook, and clean, but auntie thought if I could do that, and read, and write, and cast up accounts, it would be enough for me. She never thought I should come to live at Mount Eden."

"Never mind, my dear," replied Mr. Caryll kindly. "You know the most useful things, after all, and the rest is easily managed. But here is the big house, as they call it about here. How do you like the look of your new home, Evelyn?"

"Oh, uncle, it is beautiful—magnificent! I never saw any house like it in my life before. And did you build it all yourself?"

"Yes; I built it myself," replied Mr. Caryll, with a heavy sigh.

How well he remembered what his wife—the love of his life—had said when she first saw the completed mansion, and what plans for future happiness within its walls they had laid together. And now his Marian was sleeping in the churchyard of St Mary Ottery, and his son—the pride of his old age—was food for the fishes in the Brazilian seas. Oh, it was hard—bitterly hard—to have been made the sport of fate in such a remorseless manner. As he stepped from his carriage to enter the hall, where the servants, headed by Mrs. Wedderburn, the housekeeper, were waiting to receive him, Evelyn thought he looked much older and more decrepid than he had done in Liverpool, but that might have been only the effects of the long journey.

"Mrs. Wedderburn," he said, as the housekeeper advanced to assist him, "this is my niece, Miss Evelyn Rayne—my poor sister's daughter, you may remember,—who will live with me for the future at Mount Eden. I seem to have forgotten the names and situations of the rooms here—my mind is a little hazy on that point; but you'll see that Miss Rayne has a nice one, and every attention, till I can arrange matters."

"Certainly, Mr. Caryll; and for yourself, you would prefer, perhaps, not to occupy the old suite?"

"Yes, yes, yes. Where else should I go? Where else should I go?" he reiterated, in a dazed and uncertain manner.

After which, Evelyn was scarcely surprised to hear that her uncle did not feel well enough to come downstairs again that evening, but would take some refreshment in his own room.

"Poor dear gentleman," quoth Mrs. Wedderburn, as she hovered about Evelyn's supper-table, and piled dainties on her plate, "he must feel coming back to this place terrible

—so happy as they was here, he and the mistress, and so doting on their little son. It's hard for him to be left alone after all."

"Poor uncle," acquiesced Evelyn compassionately. "Yes, it must be a sad home-coming for him. And did you know my aunt and my Cousin Hugh, Mrs. Wedderburn?"

"To be sure, my dear. I came to the big house when it was first built, and saw your poor dear aunt carried out of it. But I left soon after that to be married to Mr. Wedderburn, and didn't return here till the house was empty, so I hadn't seen Master Hugh since he was a baby. But when they told me as he had been drownded, I cried like a child myself. Such a bonnie little lad as he was. You put me powerfully in mind of him, Miss."

"So uncle's servant, Barnes, says. I suppose that is why uncle took a fancy to me. I never expected to come to live at Mount Eden."

"Well, it's a surprise to *me*, too, Miss; though who has more right to be remembered by him than his own sister's child? But we heard down here as Mr. Caryll had adopted Mr. Edward's boy instead of Master Hugh, and meant to leave him all his money, same as if he had been his son. Did you know him, Miss? and is the young gentleman likely to be here as well?"

Evelyn blushed and stammered, but was loyal to her absent lover.

"Yes, of course, I know him. He is my first cousin, you know, Mrs. Wedderburn, but I am sorry to say that uncle and he have had a misunderstanding."

"Lor! that's a pity, now; and with a place like Mount Eden weighing in the balance. I hope it's nothing serious, for Mr. Caryll's a man of his word. But these boys will be headstrong and mischievous at times, and I daresay it will soon blow over."

Evelyn was silent.

"Is the young gentleman at Liverpool, Miss?" said the housekeeper inquisitively.

"No, Mrs. Wedderburn, he has left, and I don't know where he may be at present. And I don't think Uncle Roger would like it talked about, because he never mentions the subject himself."

"Ah, well! if some lose, others will win," replied Wedderburn oracularly; "and there's no doubt that the more one

looks at you, the more you remind one of poor Master Hugh. So I hope you'll be a comfort to the master, Miss, for the poor gentleman needs it."

But from that day, though Evelyn's life was full of ease and luxury, it was very dull. At first she thought she could never be tired of roaming over the beautiful Hampshire hills, and through the rich pasture lands and water meadows, or sitting, lost in the recesses of the park, listening to the sounds, and inhaling the scents by which she was surrounded. But after a while she became so accustomed to the monotony of her new life, that she began to miss the variety of the old one. Cooking dinners, and running messages, and mending clothes may not be interesting, but it is more suitable employment for a gregarious animal than solitary brooding. And Mr. Caryll shut himself up almost entirely in his own room. The return to the scene of all his joys and disappointments had brought memory back in such a flood upon his mind as almost to overwhelm him, and he found himself quite unequal to the task which he had set himself to do. It is true that he appeared at meals, but he was generally absorbed and melancholy during their progression, and sought solitude as soon as they were over. The active work of looking after his mercantile interests had kept up his health and spirits far more than he had given it credit for, and with its cessation they both seemed to fail. A month after he returned to Mount Eden, he looked ten years older than he had done before, and had almost lost the power of locomotion. He did not, however, forget his duty to Evelyn Rayne. He engaged an admirable resident governess to finish her education, and gave her every other advantage which money could procure. But the girl began to sicken in an atmosphere so artificial to her. She loved the country, but she hated her own company, and looked back with longing to the days when Aunt Maria had scolded her for burning the toast, or staying too long at market. Her governess was amiable and accomplished, and her hours of study were a real pleasure; but when they were over, Miss Middleton considered the rest of the day her own, and Evelyn was left to amuse herself. And with solitude came back the remembrance of Will, and she wandered about the grounds, wondering where he was, and why she did not hear from him, and how long it would be before they met again.

One day these thoughts had so overcome her, and the idea that Will and she were parted for all their lives bore in so forcibly upon her mind, that the poor child could find no relief except in tears. She had wandered to a part of the park which was called "The Fairy Dell," on account of the way in which the trees were interlaced above it, and the lovely carpet of moss and ferns that was spread beneath them. There was a tiny stream of water, too, fringed with forget-me-nots, that ran through the "fairy dell," and a break in the clasping branches overhead, that let in the streaks of sunshine to prevent its looking gloomy. Evelyn had singled this out as her favorite spot from the first moment she had seen it, and generally sought it as soon as she found herself alone. But to-day she could not see its beauties. Mr. Caryll had made some remark at breakfast-time about the impossibility of her truant cousin ever seeing England again, and the truth had pierced into her heart. She had been careless and inattentive to her lessons, and Miss Middleton had rebuked her sharply. So everything had gone wrong that morning, and poor Evelyn was longing for the dust and the grime of Liverpool, and the days when she had had Will's socks to darn, and shirts to mend, and had looked forward to a future spent in work for him. She was grateful to her uncle, and she respected her governess, but she could not love either of them as she had loved her fussy but good-natured Aunt Maria, nor her darling Will. So, when she reached the fairy dell, her tears began to flow freely, until she lost all restraint over herself, and sobbed aloud, with her face buried in her hands.

"Why do you cry?" demanded a child's voice close to her ear.

Evelyn looked up in amazement.

In the fairy dell, with her hands full of blue forget-me-nots, stood the loveliest little girl she had ever seen. In age between six and seven years old, her flaxen hair curled like spun silk about her face and shoulders, and her large blue eyes, shaded by dark lashes, looked out at Evelyn wistfully from a complexion of milk and roses. Her dress showed that she belonged to a high station in life, though the Valenciennes lace and silk ribbons had suffered sadly from contact with the long grass and low bushes of the park. But Evelyn saw nothing but the face—the charming, cherub-like face—that beamed on her like that of a little angel.

"Oh, you darling!" she exclaimed. "Where did you come from? What is your name?"

"I'm Aggie, and I've run away," replied the little one, with infantine glee.

Evelyn forgot her own troubles at once. From the moment she first saw little Agnes she conceived an affection for her.

"But where have you run from, my darling?" she said, holding out her arms. "Come nearer—don't be afraid of me—and tell me where you live."

"I'm not afraid," replied the child, boldly drawing close to her new friend, and gazing up into her face. "I'm Aggie, and I live over there," waving her hand in a vague manner about her head. "But you mustn't cry; it's naughty. I'll kiss it all away."

And, suiting the action to the word, the little one raised her rosy lips to her new friend's tear-stained face, and kissed it softly.

Evelyn Rayne was affectionate and impulsive. Her heart was hungering for love amidst all the luxury with which she was surrounded, and the child's sympathy touched her deeply. She opened her arms suddenly, and clasped her to her bosom with an intuition that they would love each other. And the intuition proved to be correct. She soon found that the little girl was Agnes Featherstone, the only child of a rich banker and his wife, living at Featherstone Hall, a place about a mile distant from Mount Eden. How she had strayed away from her nurses, and found her way into Mr. Caryll's park, was never plainly made known; but Evelyn, after taking her up to the big house, had the pleasure of restoring her to her parents, who were in terror at her loss, and never forgot the service rendered them; and from that time scarcely a day passed that Evelyn did not contrive to meet her little friend.

Mrs. Featherstone was very pleased her daughter should have the advantage of an older companion to look after and play with her, and Evelyn soon loved Agnes with a devotion that could scarcely have been exceeded had she been her own. Her heart was empty, and she filled it with little Agnes Featherstone.

It is unnecessary to dwell much longer on this, the most uneventful portion of her life. Under the able direction of Miss Middleton, she greatly improved in appearance,

and manners, and accomplishments; and two years after she went to live at Mount Eden, one would hardly have recognized her as the half-grown, half-clothed, half-educated girl, who had been little better than a servant in the house of Miss Rayne at Liverpool. But her life had been a very monotonous one. Her uncle had never rallied from the apathetic condition into which he had fallen on returning to Mount Eden, and only changed it to become a helpless paralytic, who was wheeled about the grounds of his estate more dead than alive, and apparently took no notice of anything around him.

And all this time there had been no news received of any sort from William Caryll. From the time he had disappeared from Liverpool, he had been as one dead to all he had left behind him, and forgotten by all into the bargain, except the faithful heart of Evelyn Rayne. She had wept for his loss until the fountain of her tears was dry; but still she would not believe but that he would return some day to claim her as his own.

When Evelyn was nineteen, Miss Middleton left her. She considered her pupil's education was finished, and that it was time she assumed her position as head of her uncle's household. But a very few weeks after this change had been made, the most unexpected event of our heroine's life occurred to her.

She came down to breakfast one morning to be told by Mrs. Wedderburn that Mr. Caryll was no more. He had been found dead in his bed when his attendant went to rouse him.

Evelyn received the news as any young girl would have done—with a terrible sense of horror and bereavement. She would have sent at once for her Aunt Maria to keep her company, but, alas! poor Miss Rayne (who had looked forward to that day as one in which Evelyn would not forget her) had joined the great majority six months before, and her niece felt utterly alone.

Then came the funeral, and the lawyers, and the will; and she heard, to her amazement, that instead of a legacy, as she had expected, she was left (failing the return of her cousin Hugh) the sole inheritrix of that vast estate, with fifteen thousand a year to keep it up on.

At first the poor child felt anything but elated or happy at her good fortune. Whilst every one was congratulat-

ing or envying her, she was wondering what she should do with such a responsibility upon her shoulders, or how she could ever make up her mind to live at Mount Eden alone. But once familiarized with the idea, another sprung up to give her courage for the task—the remembrance of the vow that she and Will Caryll had mutually taken on themselves—that, whichever inherited Mount Eden, should share it with the other. From that moment the estate appeared to be no longer hers, but his; and she was looking after its interests and increasing its value, not for herself, but him.

And so she lived and acted, though without a word or token from the man she still believed in; yet with full faith that time alone was needed to restore them to each other —until we meet her again.

CHAPTER X.

THE CAPTAIN AND VERNON.

"I DON'T believe," said Captain Philip, as he stretched himself with more pleasure than prudence on the thyme-scented, moss-enamelled turf; "I don't believe, if you were to search all England—or the world itself, for that matter—you could find a lovelier spot than Mount Eden."

"I quite agree with you," replied John Vernon, as he inhaled a deep draught of the fresh, exhilarating air, and his eye roved over an expanse of undulating hills and fertile pasture lands.

It was spring. The trees had just assumed a mantle of tender green, and the lilacs and laburnums were in blossom. The meadows were sprinkled with buttercups and daisies, amongst which the young lambs skipped and gambolled together until recalled by a warning cry from their mothers. By every hedgerow, and behind each moss-grown boulder, peeped infant ferns and tiny lichens, whilst yellow primroses, with their wide-open, innocent eyes, were planted in the grass like gems.

John Vernon, fresh home from sea, stood by the captain's side, with his sunburnt face and curly head uncovered, looking as if he could never be satiated with the

natural beauties that surrounded him. All breathed of life —young, hopeful life—vigor, health, and purity, and one might well be forgiven for forgetting—if only for a moment —that such ugly things as death and dishonor cast their shadows over a world so fair.

"It is lovely," continued Vernon presently—"exquisitely and unmitigatedly lovely. We've knocked about a bit together, Captain Philip, and we've seen some grand scenery in India and Australia, on the Himalaya Mountains, and in the bush, but nothing to beat this. Just look at those uplands to the left. When the breeze ripples through the young blades of grass, you might fancy you were on the sea again. What splendid timber there is on the estate, too, and what rich pasturage! I counted thirty cows in that field yonder."

"I daresay," rejoined the captain carelessly; "and that's not the half of the milking herd. A good deal of the revenues of Mount Eden are derived from its dairy and farm produce. I could hardly tell you, without reference to my books, how many head of cattle we send up to the London market annually."

"Such a place must be worth thousands a year."

"It is worth fifteen thousand, or thereabouts."

"And it all belongs to a bit of a girl! How absurd it seems," said Vernon, who considered the Salic law as a gross injury to the stronger sex.

Captain Philip laughed.

"Your description hardly applies to Miss Rayne. In the first place, she is a woman who has left her girlhood behind her. In the second, she is a very tall and dignified one."

"Oh, I see! An old maid."

"Hardly that either," returned the captain drily; "Miss Rayne was twenty-seven, I believe, on her last birthday. But she is quite equal to managing her own affairs, and wields her sceptre over Mount Eden royally."

"Captain Philip," said the younger man, after a pause, "will you forgive me for saying something? This is a beautiful country and a charming estate. I can admire it as much as you do, and after knocking about at sea for the last three years, the rest and the change are but too delightful. Yet I could not endure it for always. I should miss the excitement and active work of our profession.

This peaceful, uneventful life would pall upon me, and I cannot understand your having chucked up the service so suddenly, to bury yourself down here.

John Vernon was a young fellow of perhaps two-and-twenty, who had had but little experience of life. It did not, therefore, strike him as anything strange that Captain Philip should busy himself in filling and lighting a pipe before he answered his observation.

"My boy," he said, when he did speak, "I never cared for the service as you do. I entered it before I knew what I was about, or what lay before me, and I stayed in it because there was no other opening for me. But it was never a profession to my taste."

"And yet you were always quoted to me as such an excellent seaman, with a perfect knowledge of your duties," replied Vernon, in a tone of disappointment.

"I tried to do my duty, Jack, whilst I remained in it, and probably, had this billet not been offered to me, I might have been in the merchant service to this day. But —but—well, I don't mind telling you, lad, that I was brought up in a higher social sphere, and that the moral atmosphere and surroundings of a seafaring life were never to my taste. It is different with you, Jack. You come of a family of sailors, and, I daresay, your mother mixed your first pap with salt water. You are in your right element at sea, and you will go on till you reach the top of the tree. I shall see you, if I live, with a ship or two of your own, by-and-bye, whilst I am still checking the farrier's and corn-chandler's accounts for Mount Eden."

"And you can prefer such work," exclaimed Vernon, rather contemptuously, "to the glorious excitement of riding over the waves, and the substantial benefit of trading with foreign countries? Captain Philip, I cannot understand it. To live all alone in that little cottage, pretty as it may be, and spend one's life in looking after somebody else's money, is so tame and unvaried an existence compared to that to which we have been accustomed, that it would drive me mad."

"And to me it is paradise. Therein lies the difference," replied Captain Philip calmly, pulling at his pipe. "I like my own company, Vernon, and I love Mount Eden. My pipe is sufficient society for me, as a rule, and I like to feel that I am directing the management of this vast estate, and making it yield all the profit of which it is capable."

"What is your interest in it?" demanded Vernon curtly.

His companion started.

"*My interest!* Why, that of land-agent and overseer, to be sure. What other interest could I have? I am Miss Rayne's servant, but I am also her right hand and confidential adviser; and I don't think she would find it easy to replace me. I have the same interest in Mount Eden that I had in my ship; I want to do my duty by it. That is all."

"But you knew this part of Hampshire before you came to Mount Eden, captain?"

"Who told you so?"

"I guessed it from your evident familiarity with everything about you. One does not gain such a thorough knowledge of the soil and the idiosyncrasies of the people in a twelvemonth."

"Well, I *was* in the county as a boy—in fact, I was born in Hampshire," said Captain Philip, somewhat reluctantly; "but that fact could have no power to keep me in my present position, for I left it too early to have obtained any serviceable knowledge. And I have no friends living here now—none whatever."

"You have such a snug berth, and you seem so determined to keep it, captain," said the younger man laughing, "that I expect you have some fair lady in your mind's eye, and we shall hear of a wedding at Mount Eden before we're back in port again."

Captain Philip colored ruddily through his bronzed skin; he had not yet lost the capacity to blush. Although he had held the rank of captain in the merchant service during two voyages, he was not more than five-and-thirty, and it would have been difficult to find a better-looking bridegroom for any girl about Mount Eden.

Tall and muscular, with a face from which the sunburn of exposure was but partially removed, and a brown beard, close and crisp, that lay upon his chest, Captain Philip was a fine specimen of a powerful and well-built Englishman. His nose was a trifle heavy, perhaps, and his mouth, from the luxuriance of his moustaches, was an unknown feature, but he had a pair of honest, kind, grey eyes, that would have redeemed a far plainer physiognomy. It was sheer kindness that had made him ask this young fellow Vernon down to spend his time on shore in Hampshire.

He had been one of his apprentices during the last two voyages he had made, and Captain Philip knew that the lad was an orphan, and had no home to go to during his brief holiday.

But he hardly thought that he would have brought him so sternly to book for having become Miss Rayne's land-agent; a captain on board ship and a captain on shore are two such very different things.

"Let us stroll towards the stables, Jack," he said, as he rose to his feet, more with a view to changing the conversation than any other motive. "I have a word to say to the coachman about his corn bill. It takes a man's whole time to prevent these servants cheating. Their moral obliquity is remarkable. There are some articles, to annex which you can no more convince them is robbery than that they have no right to the warmth of the sun; and others, again, they would not touch if their lives depended on it."

"Does Miss Rayne keep many horses?" demanded Vernon.

"Thirty, or so, with the farm horses. She could do with less; but she is very generous, as well as kind-hearted, and she is devoted to her animals. She would no more overwork a horse than she would a fellow-creature. And she is very decided into the bargain. It is of no use remonstrating with her against what she considers right. She *will* have her own way."

"Well, she has nothing apparently to spend her money on except her whims. It does seem so strange to me, a *woman* having such a fortune under her control. It doesn't seem right at all. How did she come by it?"

"In the usual way. She inherited under her late uncle's will."

"But was there no man to take it? Has she no relatives?"

"Not in her generation—at least so I've heard—or none at all events whom her uncle, Mr. Caryll, considered so worthy to inherit his property. He was a rich merchant, and she was his sister's only child. She was mistress of Mount Eden before she came of age."

"But why hasn't she married?" asked Vernon eagerly.

"I don't know," replied Captain Philip laconically.

"Isn't she engaged to be married?"

"I don't know," repeated the captain.

"How strange. I should have thought the fellows would have jumped at her, with all that money. Is she handsome?"

"*You* might not call her so, Jack."

"What, with fifteen thousand a year! Why, *I* should think her handsome if she were as black as those African women who used to come aboard to sell us porcupine quills and ostrich eggs off the Gold Coast. But, seriously, Captain Philip, what *is* she like?"

"She is tall and fair, and I believe she is considered good-looking. She has very pleasant manners, but she is grave and serious for so young a woman. Sometimes I thing she worries herself too much about the estate, and feels her responsibilities too deeply."

"Oh, she'll be all right when she's married," exclaimed Vernon, to whom, as to most very young people, marriage appeared a panacea for every trouble. "What *she* wants is a man to take all the responsibility off her hands, and leave her nothing to do but to enjoy herself. A woman's mind is not equal to such a strain. The funny part of it is, that she's not been hooked long ago. What a berth it would be to fall into," he concluded, with his eyes raised heavenwards.

Captain Philip turned upon his young friend unnecessarily sharply.

"Well, it won't be *your* chance to fall into it, my boy, so you needn't take the trouble to look so ecstatic. Should Miss Rayne ever marry, which I think sometimes she is far too sensible to do, she will probably ally her wealth with the aristocracy. But she's wedded to Mount Eden, at least for the present."

"Does she live alone?"

"Quite alone, except for her servants, and that circumstance prohibits her receiving any guests at Mount Eden, except an occasional lady friend, and she doesn't care much for them. Little Miss Featherstone and she have the house pretty well to themselves."

"And who is Miss Featherstone?"

"The only daughter and heiress of Mr. Andrew Featherstone, the banker, who lives in that big house over the hill —Featherstone Hall, they call it. Miss Featherstone is only seventeen, and Miss Rayne has made a pet of her for

the last ten years. In fact, I don't think there's anybody in the world that she cares so much for as for Agnes Featherstone. They are like sisters; and when she is at home, Miss Agnes lives as much at Mount Eden as at the Hall. But the family have spent this winter in Italy, and sometimes I fancy Miss Rayne has felt the separation more than she will acknowledge. By Jove! here she comes."

They had been strolling leisurely along a breezy bit of upland, and then through a green lane, on their way to the stables, and had just turned into a copse at the foot of the lower drive. Here the young fir trees and larches, crowned with dark, gummy buds, and pale-green feathery sprays, were beginning to put forth their delicate pink blossoms; and their fallen leaves, shorn by the winter's frost, formed a nice warm bed for the blue and white violets, which grew in profusion at their roots. Vernon looked up at the captain's words, and saw a tall gracious woman advancing slowly to meet them, with her hands full of the fragrant blossoms. She was at a sufficient distance for him to be able to scrutinize her appearance without discourtesy, and his first feeling was one of surprise to remember how coldly Captain Philip had spoken of her charms. Evelyn Rayne was by this time seven-and-twenty, but her slight, graceful figure made her look like a girl. Her dress was remarkably plain. A grey woollen gown of some coarse, homespun fabric, tailor-made, but simple almost to severity, a broad-brimmed straw hat, with a black ribbon twisted round it, and a pair of tan-colored driving gloves, completed her costume. But Vernon never looked at what she wore. All he saw was a small head, crowned with a luxuriance of chestnut hair, which spoke well for the physical health of its owner; a broad, intellectual forehead, a mouth full of firmness and sweetness combined, and a pair of lovely dark-blue eyes, large, long, and heavy-lidded, but with a very searching look in their Mediterranean depths. Her beauty burst upon John Vernon like a revelation. He thought he had never seen so truly handsome a woman in his life before. His ideas of female loveliness hitherto had been associated with the Fannies, and Lucies, and Lilies of his boyish days, and, later on, with the Mollies, and Dollies, and Sukies of the docks and seaport towns; but never before had he been brought in contact with so noble-

looking a creature as Evelyn Rayne. Metaphysically speaking, he was at her feet in a moment; and never afterwards, during the course of a long and eventful life, did John Vernon ever think of his ideal of female excellence without recalling the vision of the mistress of Mount Eden, as she advanced to meet them with bunches of blue and white violets in her hands

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CHAPTER XI.

BACHELOR'S HALL.

"GOOD-MORNING, Captain Philip," she said, with a smile and an inclination of her head, but without offering him her hand; "I saw you coming over the three-cornered patch, and waited to speak to you here."

"Good-morning, Miss Rayne, I hope you are quite well?" responded the captain; "I have been showing my young friend, Mr. Vernon, who is staying at the cottage for a few days, the view from Fern Hill, and he is as charmed with it as the rest of the world."

As Captain Philip indicated the presence and personality of John Vernon, Miss Rayne turned to him and bowed, but very slightly. There was evidently just that understanding between her land-agent and herself that there should be. She was perfectly at her ease with Captain Philip, but she was not familiar with him. They communicated freely and confidentially, but from different planes. She never forgot that she was the owner of Mount Eden, nor he that he was her servant. Each felt the temptation sometimes, perhaps, to approach each other on more equal terms, but each resisted it. Some feeling, that was still not repugnance, seemed to keep them apart. Perhaps they both remembered the old adage about familiarity breeding contempt.

"I am glad that Mr. Vernon admires our scenery," said Evelyn, after a pause, "and it is a day to make everything look its best. I wonder," she continued, turning on her heel to gaze at her fair domain, "I wonder if there is any country in the world where spring is more beautiful than in England?"

"In America," commenced Vernon, with all the confidence of a very young man, before the other sex has taken to snubbing him; "in the Western States of America, Miss Rayne, the spring—"

Miss Rayne turned upon him suddenly, with an unmistakable look of displeasure in her eyes.

"I know nothing of America," she said hurriedly, as she buried her face in her flowers; "Captain Philip, I am afraid we shall have to dismiss Roberts after all. Wilson tells me he was the worse for liquor again last night."

"I was on my way to the stables to inquire into it, Miss Rayne, and into a fresh error in his account. Just look at that bill," replied Captain Philip, producing a long slip of paper from his waistcoat pocket.

Miss Rayne ran her eye over it.

"Absurd," she exclaimed; "forty bushels of oats. Captain Philip, it *cannot* be *forty*. It is too ridiculous!"

"It is written down forty, plain enough," he answered, "but he cannot have fairly used half the quantity. I am afraid there is nothing for it but dismissal. The man will evidently take no warning."

"We must go and see about it," said Miss Rayne promptly; "and Frodsham has come over, too, about Gadfly's strain. He says there is no cure but fireing. It will ruin her marketable value, but anything is better than that the poor mare should suffer."

"Why not turn her out to grass for a few months' rest, and then sell her, Miss Rayne?"

"And let her pass into the hands of some one who would work her, ill or well, until she dropped? No, thank you, Captain Philip. I don't want that sort of advice. Gadfly shall go into the pensioners' paddock first."

"Why, it's crammed full already," cried Captain Philip, laughing.

At that she laughed too.

"Never mind, we'll devote a second paddock to the dear old things, if necessary. But come to the stables now, and let us get this business over at once."

She turned quickly, and, without another glance at Vernon, walked by Captain Philip's side. The captain saw that she expected him to accompany her alone.

"Go back and wait for me at the cottage, Jack," he called over his shoulder to the young man, who was com-

pelled unwillingly to obey. But he stopped for some minutes first, gazing after the mistress of Mount Eden, and watching the eager, animated manner in which she was discussing some subject with her companion. He envied the luck of his quondam "skipper," as he saw him walking so familiarly by her side, and no longer wondered that he should have preferred to be her land-agent to knocking about amongst a lot of rough fellows at sea. At the same time, Jack Vernon had an uncomfortable feeling in his own mind, and a conviction, though he could not say why, that in some way or other he had been unfortunate enough to offend Miss Rayne by mentioning America. And yet, how could he possibly have done so? As he strolled back to Captain Philip's cottage, he ran over every little incident of the past interview, in order to try and account for the heiress' curt manner towards him, but he could not think of a single thing in which he had transgressed the rules of good breeding; unless, indeed, unknown to himself, his undoubted admiration of her had been too apparent in his eyes. But women are not used, as a rule, to take offence at silent admiration from the other sex, however unmistakably displayed.

A few minutes' walk brought him to his friend's cottage, which Miss Rayne had playfully nicknamed "Bachelor's Hall."

Captain Philip might have occupied a suite of rooms up at the big house if he had willed it. His predecessor had done so, and lived on the fat of the land; and had the free use of the servants, and carriages, and horses, as he chose to order them. But Captain Philip had been too long at sea, he said, to care to live in a crowd. He picked out an empty cottage on the estate, which had been occupied by a gamekeeper; and asked leave to inhabit it instead; and Evelyn had first laughingly remonstrated with him for making himself uncomfortable, and then called him a recluse, and given him leave to do exactly as he chose. And what he chose was to live there quite alone. He would not even have a servant to sleep in the house. One of the women from the farm came in each morning to set his rooms to rights, and cook his dinner, after which she disappeared, and left Captain Philip to wait on himself for the remainder of the day. He preferred it—so he told John Vernon. What did he want with a servant twiddling her thumbs in

the kitchen for half her time. He liked to feel that he was master in his own house. There was not much to be master of. Four small rooms constituted the extent of Bachelor's Hall, but they were very comfortable. Miss Rayne had furnished them with good, substantial beds, and chairs, and tables from the big house, and Captain Philip had decorated them with the curiosities he had collected during his wanderings. The little sitting-room was an illustrated diary of his voyages. Barbaric weapons and wild animals' skins were mingled with rare shells, and eggs, and feathers, and gleaming bits of ore, until it looked like a museum. On one side of the fireplace stood the captain's writing-table, which shut with a circular cover when not in use, and locked away his business papers from curious eyes; and in the other, a wide arm-chair in which he was accustomed to sit when work was over, and commune with his pipe. This habit of thinking and smoking had grown upon Captain Philip whilst at sea. He had been noted there for his silent and reflective disposition; and some people had gone so far as to say it was not altogether natural to him, but that some cloud hung over the captain's past, which he would not even think of in any company but that of his pipe.

"He was always a strange fellow," thought Jack Vernon, as he gazed round at the orderly adornment of the little room. "Who, to look at the arrangement of these trifles, would imagine it had been done by a man who has been used, for the best part of his life, to occupy a cabin, six feet by six, decorated by a sea-chest and a swinging tray? Flowers, feathers and photographs. One might fancy it was the work of a woman's hand. It's a sweet little place," he continued, as he turned towards the open casement, and a hanging branch of flowering clematis brushed across his face; "a perfect romance in the shape of a cottage, but what on earth made the skipper settle himself down here? That's the puzzle to me. How can he stand the quiet and monotony? There's only one solution to it. He's in love with Miss Rayne. Well, I don't wonder at that."

Feeling satisfied with the conclusion at which he had arrived, without taking into consideration the fact that Captain Philip had probably accepted his present situation without ever having seen Miss Rayne, Jack Vernon

threw himself into the arm chair, and began to think it must be dinner-time.

The cloth was spread upon the table. A large ham, in cut, a few fresh crisp lettuces, and a Stilton cheese stood on it; and when the captain returned, a dish of new potatoes would complete the frugal meal. He had warned Vernon what he had to expect in visiting Bachelor's Hall. He had retained all the simple habits of seafaring life. A heavy meal revolted instead of stimulating his appetite, and he lived almost as sparingly as a hermit. But there was nothing hermit-like in the manner in which, half-an-hour later, the captain entered the cottage. His handsome face was smiling joyfully, and he flung his soft felt hat down on the floor like an impetuous boy.

"No more work to-day, Jack!" he exclaimed, "and as soon as we've swallowed our dinner we'll ride over to Leighton and see the retrievers I was talking to you about this morning. I suppose you can manage to stick on a horse, and I have always the privilege of mounting a friend from the Mount Eden stables."

"But what's in the wind now, captain?" inquired the younger man, as they drew their chairs up to the table and commenced to attack the ham; "I thought you said this afternoon was to see the foundation laid of a new decoy?"

"So it was arranged, my boy; but everything's altered now. '*Femme souvent varie.*' Oh, I forgot, you don't understand the lingo, but the English of it is that Miss Rayne has received news that has put everything else out of her head. The Featherstones have returned to the Hall."

"And is that circumstance of sufficient importance to upset all her plans?"

"My dear fellow, you don't understand the attachment that exists between Miss Rayne and Miss Featherstone, or you wouldn't ask such a question. I never saw two people so fond of one another in my life before! They are simply inseparable, or rather they have been until this winter. But Mrs. Featherstone took it suddenly into her head that her daughter's education could not be completed without visiting Paris and Rome, and so they left England six months ago, and Miss Rayne has not been the same creature without them."

"I wonder she did not go too."

"How could she? She has her estate to look after," rejoined the captain quickly.

"She could leave it safely in your hands, surely?"

"Not entirely. You don't know how completely she associates herself with the management of affairs. She is her own bailiff and steward, and (I was going to add) farrier, but she really knows more about doctoring the stock than the village veterinary. She gave a ball to a horse this morning that the grooms dared not approach."

"I don't like to see a woman do such unfeminine things," said Vernon sententiously.

"Don't you?" replied Captain Philip, in his dry way; "at any rate, Mount Eden would get on very badly without Miss Rayne,"

"And now her *fidus achates* has returned to her?"

"Yes, and most unexpectedly—at least to herself. Miss Feathersone wishing, it seems, to give her friend a surprise, concealed the fact that they were on their way home, and the first intimation Miss Rayne received of it was by a note brought over by a groom to say Miss Agnes would be with her this afternoon. If you had only seen her, Jack! In five minutes, pleasure had transformed her into another creature. You would hardly have recognized her as the serious young lady you saw this morning. She was dimpling all over with smiles, and as soon as the most pressing work was over, she gave every one concerned a holiday, with leave to drink Miss Agnes' health at her expense. It is pleasant to see her look so happy," concluded Captain Philip, in a musing way.

"Well, it is incredible to me, one woman being so fond of another," said John Vernon. "Is Miss Featherstone such a very fascinating young person?"

"Not at all, I should say, to an ordinary spectator. She is just a simple, pretty, lovable girl; but Miss Rayne has known her intimately for the last ten years, and there is no doubt she is exceedingly fond of her. Sometimes I think," said Captain Philip slowly, "that if no one should start up to claim it, Miss Rayne will leave Mount Eden to Miss Featherstone."

"Why do you say if no one should start up to claim it?" I thought the property was left to her unconditionally?

"So it is—to her and her heirs after her. But should

she not marry, or die intestate, there may be other relatives of the late Mr. Caryll to put in a legal claim to the property. You know how many loopholes there are in law. Miss Rayne has told me that her late uncle had a nephew by his brother, who would have inherited before herself had he been living, and that no certain proofs have ever been received of his decease."

"Then he may turn up any day and turn her out of Mount Eden?" exclaimed Vernon.

"Yes; he certainly may turn up any day, but I don't think he will turn Miss Rayne out of Mount Eden," replied Captain Philip, after a pause.

"But surely she will marry," urged his companion. "It is quite unnatural to think of such a fine woman remaining single. I can't believe she makes all this fuss for the sake of Miss Featherstone only. Come, now, isn't there a brother, or a cousin, or some one belonging to the fair Agnes in the background? Your description of Miss Rayne's excitement at their return home sounds so much more like the anticipation of meeting a lover than a female friend."

The captain's brow lowered.

"You don't know what you're talking about," he answered shortly; "Miss Rayne is above all that sort of nonsense. She hasn't got a lover, and I don't believe she has ever had one. She is a female anchorite, wedded to her business and the management of her estate. She has lived at Mount Eden since she was seventeen, and those who have been with her all the time tell me it has always been the same. She never entertains, except in a hospitable, friendly manner, and she never has any one to stay in the house. As for young men—excepting when she gives a neighbor leave to beat the covers or to fish in the stream, I never see one about the place. Lover! Nonsense! Miss Rayne has much more sense than you give her credit for."

"All right, captain," cried Vernon laughing, "no offence meant, and I hope none taken. I didn't undersand that Miss Rayne was proof against all the weaknesses of her charming sex. Mount Eden is rightly named. It is a paradise; and she is its Eve. But a solitary unmated Eve is an anomaly. Adam should, by rights, have been here to meet her."

"Well, he isn't here, and what's more, we don't want him," replied the captain, as they rose from table and prepared for their journey to Leighton.

CHAPTER XII.

AT THE BIG HOUSE.

MEANWHILE Evelyn—the same Evelyn we have known, and yet so unlike what she was in her girlish days—was roaming about the big house, restless and excited, in anticipation of the promised meeting with Agnes Featherstone. It was not an ordinary affection which she felt for this young girl. One could see that by the trembling eagerness with which she changed her dress in anticipation of the arrival of her friend; by the nervous fingers that arranged and re-arranged the ornaments about her sitting-room, and the repeated journeys she made backwards and forwards to the window to see if there were any signs of Agnes' approach.

How this love which had made all the happiness of Evelyn's later years had sprung up from a frail seedling to a tree, whose sturdy growth could resist the shock of any earthly storm, was best known to the great Being who sends us the affection of our fellow-creatures to keep our hearts from breaking under the afflictions of the world. But no two women could have been more dissimilar either in mind or body; perhaps in that very fact lay the secret of the tie between them. Evelyn, tall, womanly, and commanding, moving like a queen amongst her dependants, and asking for neither advice nor support from any one; and Agnes, a soft, loving, and somewhat simple girl, never sure of her own opinion, and ready to cling to the first hand held out to her. But it was her very childishness that made Agnes so dear to her friend, who felt almost like a mother when she held her in her arms. Evelyn had never forgotten the day she first saw the pouting cherub in the fairy dell, and scarcely realized that Agnes was much older now than she had been when she pressed her rosy baby lips against her face, in an attempt to comfort her. From that time the younger girl had lived between the big

house and the Hall, and looked upon Evelyn as an elder sister. Indeed, it never seemed to enter either of their heads that they were not relations, and perhaps it *had* entered Evelyn's (as Captain Philip had shrewdly suggested), that, in the event of her not marrying, she might leave Mount Eden to her little friend. But at this moment her mind was occupied solely by the thought of their reunion; and, by the time that the carriage wheels from Featherstone Hall stopped before the portico, her cheeks were burning, and her eyes beaming with excitement and suspense. Agnes did not wait to be announced, but, leaping from the carriage, ran straight to the morning-room, where she knew that she should find her friend. As soon as the young women met, they flew into each other's arms, and for a few minutes nothing was to be heard but the sound of their repeated kissing, and a few low sobs of pleasure from Agnes Featherstone. They separated at last, but it was only to fly together again with another series of embraces; and then Evelyn drew Agnes gently towards a sofa, and sat down beside her, with her arm about her waist. The tears were standing on both their faces as they turned to look at one another.

"And so, my darling, I have got you back again at last?" said Evelyn. "Oh, Agnes, this separation has been a weary time for me. Whilst you have been dancing, and flirting, and going to operas and concerts, you naughty puss, I have been hungering and thirsting for the sight of your face and the sound of your voice. I did not realize how very necessary you were to my happiness until we parted, Agnes."

The younger girl looked troubled, and a little perplexed.

And do you suppose I have not felt it also, Evelyn? There has not been a day that I didn't want you, dear. My pleasures would have been doubled had you been there to share them with me. As it was, there always seemed something wanting in everything to me. Mamma said at last that she was quite sick of hearing me say so."

"I'm afraid Mrs. Featherstone must have thought you didn't appreciate all the trouble she was taking on your account. But she doesn't know, even after all this time, how much we love each other, darling. I have had no pleasure to speak of, worthy the name, since you left England. How many times have I longed to go after you!

and if you had not seemed to be enjoying yourself so thoroughly without me, I might have done so. But there, dear, I don't mean to reproach you. It was right and natural that you should enjoy new sights and places. And you have enjoyed yourself very much, haven't you, Agnes?"

"*Very* much!" replied Miss Featherstone, with a blush that spread over her whole countenance.

"Why, what is there to blush at, you silly child? But let me have a good look at you, Agnes. What a pretty dress!—Paris fashions, I suppose? You'll be turning the heads of all the people in church next Sunday. But your dear little face is just the same, my darling. Paris has been unable either to spoil or to improve that."

It was a sweet face she was gazing into—almost *too* sweet and pretty to be very intellectual or spiritual. Agnes Featherstone had not changed so very considerably since she had been a child. She still possessed the child's complexion—clear, delicate, and with a peach-like bloom upon it, with large china-blue eyes, set wide apart in her white forehead, a *piquant* nose, with small nostrils, a pair of lips arched like a cupid's bow, and a dimpled chin. A face for a parent to dote on, and a lover to rave about, but not a face to fly to for succor, counsel, or sympathy. Her figure was small, rounded, and rather short, and her hair, which retained the blonde tint of her childhood, curled naturally all over her head. But in Evelyn's loving eyes, Agnes was perfection, both physically and mentally. Though usually far-seeing and perspicuous, she could detect no flaw in the beautiful girl whom she had made her pet and plaything for so many years. It would have been a bold person indeed who would have ventured to say a word against Agnes Featherstone in the presence of Evelyn Rayne.

"No; Paris nor any other place could ever spoil you, my darling," she repeated fondly; "and yet I hardly know my little Agnes in these fine feathers. I shall not be quite happy till I see you running about Mount Eden again in a brown holland dress and a straw hat, and feel you are all my own, as of yore. And what a lot you must have to tell me, dear! What long evenings we will spend together, talking over all you have seen and heard during your absence! When will you come and stay with me, Agnes?

Why not remain at Mount Eden now you are here? Mrs. Featherstone will be too busy settling herself to rights to miss you for the next few days."

Agnes' face palpably fell at the proposition, which in former days she would have gladly acceded to.

"Oh, Evelyn, dear, I cannot possibly remain with you—at least, not just yet. Mamma could not spare me, because—because we are not quite alone. Papa has some friends at the Hall," she said lamely.

"Guests already! and you only arrived last night! What a nuisance for your mamma. How is that, Agnes?"

"They—at least I mean he—there is only one gentleman—crossed with us from Calais," stammered Agnes.

"Some acquaintance you made abroad, I suppose. Is he a foreigner?"

"No—that is, we did meet him abroad—in Florence, I think—but he's not a foreigner, although he has lived for a long time in France and Italy, and looks very much like an Italian. And he sings, Evelyn—oh, beautifully!—and draws, and paints, and plays the violin."

"How nice! And what is his name, dear?"

"Mr. Lyle—Jasper Lyle. Papa says it's a very good name, and he feels satisfied he comes of a good family. But all his people are dead. He is the last of his race. Isn't it sad?"

"He is like me, then, Agnes. I, too, have no living relations. Mr. Lyle and I should have a fellow feeling," returned Evelyn, smiling gravely. "Is he an old man?"

"Oh, no, not at all! About thirty, I think. But, Evelyn—"

"Well, darling?"

"I have something to tell you—something very serious and important, and perhaps you will be angry with me because I have not told it you before."

"When have I ever been angry with you, Agnes?" said Evelyn, with fond reproach.

"But I have always told you all my secrets, Evelyn—you the first of all—but I couldn't help this, dear, because it would have seemed so silly, before I was quite sure, and it only happened a fortnight ago; though, of course, I could see from his manner that it was coming, and it made me awfully happy—and that is the reason that Mr. Lyle crossed over with us yesterday, and is going to stay at the Hall."

"What is it, Agnes? Tell it me quick," exclaimed Evelyn, in a voice of pain.

Agnes threw herself on her friend's bosom, and hid her blushing face in her own curls.

"Oh, Evelyn, you will never believe it, but I am engaged to be married to him, and I do love him so."

Those only—who have ever spent weeks or months in vain longing for the bodily presence of a friend whose absence took the best part of their life away, and then found that that friend had been enjoying himself so well without them as to have almost forgotten their existence—can understand what Evelyn Rayne felt when Agnes Featherstone told her she was engaged to be married. No, there is one other who could have sympathized with her.

The mother, whose dearly-cherished child has taken the most important step of her existence, without asking for either her counsel or her consent. Evelyn knew, of course, that she had no moral or legal right to expect to be consulted in the matter, but the sting of disappointment was just the same, and with the confession of her secret Agnes seemed suddenly to have slipped out of her hands. At first, she could hardly believe that she had heard aright.

Agnes—her little sister—her child, almost—engaged to be married to some stranger whom *she* had never seen or heard of before! It was incredible, and when she had recovered from her speechless surprise she said so.

"Oh, Agnes! Engaged! Going to be married? And you never told me. It is impossible."

There was such a bitter sense of not having been treated as her love had the right to expect in her voice, that the dullest person must have recognized it.

"Oh, Evelyn, how could I?" answered Agnes, without raising her head. "Jasper—that is, Mr. Lyle—only spoke to papa a week ago, and then I thought it would be so much nicer to surprise you by coming home and telling you myself. And if I had written to you about it, I shouldn't have known what to say."

"But you have never even mentioned Mr. Lyle's name to me, Agnes. How long have you known him?"

"About six weeks or two months. We met him in Rome during the Carnival. The Spencers introduced him to us.

And he took such a fancy to me, Evelyn, that he has traveled with us ever since."

"And Mr. Featherstone can actually consent to give *you* —his only child—to a man he has known for six weeks! How can he tell this Mr. Lyle will make you happy? What can he know about his character or his disposition?" said Evelyn, with hasty suspicion of the unwelcome stranger.

"I conclude papa is satisfied," replied Agnes pouting, "or he would not have consented to my engagment. Any one can see that Jasper is a gentleman, Evelyn, and he has been quite open about his money matters. He is not rich at all; but what does that signify, when *we* have so much money, and mamma says that papa will make everything right for us."

"Then Mrs. Featherstone wishes it, Agnes? She is ready to give up her ewe-lamb to a stranger's care. She seems in a great hurry to get rid of you, dear," said Evelyn, rather bitterly. But Agnes was not quick to detect sarcasm.

"Oh, no. It isn't that; but mamma l kes Jasper *awfully*," she exclaimed, with schoolgirl slang, "and so will you when you see him. He is so handsome, Evelyn. Tall and slight, with lovely blue eyes and dark hair—such an unusual combination, mamma says—and such beautiful hands and feet. And he sings splendidly—he learnt in Italy. And he sketched all the places we stopped at for my album."

"An Admirable Crichton, evidently," said Evelyn. "But all the accomplishments in the world, Agnes, are nothing compared to the one great question,—'Do you love him?'"

Agnes crimsoned like the heart of a rose.

"Evelyn, I *do* love him. I never loved anyone half so much in my life before. And if anything happened to separate us now, I think that I should die."

"Then I will learn to love him too, for your sake, darling, though he *does* threaten to take my little Agnes from me," cried Miss Rayne, as she burst into tears.

The ebullition was rather an uncommon one with her now. She had wept all her tears, as she thought, poor girl, long ago, and had hardened herself against the shocks of an unkind world. But the knowledge that Agnes

Featherstone loved some one far better than she did herself had come on her very suddenly indeed. Yet, even as she wept, she held Agnes close to her heart, and kissed her repeatedly.

"But, Evelyn dear," said the younger girl, when they could talk calmly again, "why should you be afraid that Mr. Lyle will not make me happy? It's the usual thing for girls to marry, isn't it? You don't want me to be an old maid like Aunt Sophy? You will marry yourself, some day, Evelyn."

"No, darling, never!" said Miss Rayne vehemently.

The thought of marriage brought the remembrance of her poor outcast Will to her mind. Will, wandering about America in want and poverty, or laid to rest, perhaps, in an alien grave. She never dreamed that since *he* had not returned to claim the fulfilment of the solemn vow she had made,—to be his wife,—marriage with any other man was possible to her. And so she repeated, with a determined shake of the head, "Never! *Never!*"

"But why not? Don't you like men? Do you mean to live all your life alone at Mount Eden? Surely not! It would be so very dull. Mamma says you ought to have married years ago."

"Your mamma judges me from the usual feminine standpoint, Agnes, and I am not like other women. Sometimes I think I have much more the mind and feelings of a man. The care of my property is enough to occupy my life. I don't want any interference with it or myself."

"But some one who loved you very much, Evelyn," whispered Agnes, out of her new-born experience, "would help, and not hinder you. Wouldn't it be very sweet to have all the trouble taken off your hands, and to have no bother and no anxiety?"

"I think marriage would be more likely to increase than to lessen my anxiety. But please don't talk of it any more, Agnes. It will never come to pass."

"If you only knew how nice it is," persisted Miss Featherstone.

Evelyn heaved a deep sigh.

"Why are you sighing! Sometimes, I think—"

"Well, my darling?"

"That there is a reason why you have never married, Evelyn; that there is some one you are fond of, and some-

thing has prevented your marrying him. What is it, dear? Was he unworthy of you?"

"I never thought so," replied Miss Rayne.

For the first time she felt as if she must confide in her little friend—she, who had never confided in any one before. What influence urged her on? The announcement of Agnes' engagement seemed to have stirred up the memory of passages in her own life, which could only be smoothed over by unburdening her mind of its secret.

"Then there *is* some one?" said Agnes eagerly.

"There *was* some one," replied Evelyn, with a solemn look in her sad eyes.

"Is he dead?" inquired her companion, in a tone of awe.

"No, Agnes, no! I am *certain* that he is not dead—something in my heart tells me so, but in all the wide, wide world, I do not know where he may be now. My poor Will!"

"Is it long ago, Evelyn?"

"It is as long ago as when I first came to Mount Eden, Agnes."

"Ten years; and you have not yet forgotten?"

"No, and never shall forget. But, Agnes, remember I tell you this in the strictest confidence—as one dear friend to another. I should have told you before had I thought that you would understand my feelings. But now that you know what *love* is, you will be able to sympathize with me. Don't think I want to run it down, dear. It must be the most beautiful thing God gives us,—when it turns out well,—but it so seldom turns out well. Mine has been all wrong from the beginning."

"Tell me about it, Evelyn," said Agnes, nestling close to her.

"It was my cousin, Will Caryll, darling. Before I came to Mount Eden I lived in Liverpool with my aunt, Miss Rayne, and when poor cousin Hugh was drowned at sea and uncle fetched Will down from London to fill his place in the counting-house, he put him to lodge with Aunt Maria. He was such a dear fellow, Agnes, and so fond of me. During those happy years we were together, we were inseparable. We were very poor, you know, but I have never been so happy as I was then, when I prepared all my cousin's meals for him, and kept his clothes in order,

and thought myself more than repaid when Sunday came and he took me out into the country and talked to me of love. Oh, Agnes, I did not love—I *worshipped* him! He was my all."

"But, Evelyn, why is he not here?"

"Ah, darling, that is the trouble of my life. He was wilful and high-spirited, like many other young men, and he offended uncle terribly. He was so angry with him that he turned him out of his office, and though I begged for his forgiveness on my knees, he would not take him back again. And then Will went to America—what chance was there left for him in England?—and I have never heard of him since."

"*Never heard of him since!* Didn't he write to you?"

"No, dear; he didn't even write. For ten years there has been total silence between us. But he will come back some day. I feel sure of that. It is all I am waiting for—to see Will again before I die."

Miss Featherstone was silent. She was not a clever girl, but she had sufficient sense to wonder at her friend's credulity. To go on waiting for and expecting the return of a lover who had not written for ten years, seemed a very simple thing to do. And Jasper had sworn that if *they* were separated, he should send her a letter every day. After a pause she said timidly,—

"And if he shouldn't come back, Evelyn—if—if—he should be dead?"

"He *will* come, dear—he is *not* dead," replied Miss Rayne confidently. "Have I not already told you that I have a conviction on the subject, too deep to be untrue? But I may not see him yet—not for many years. There are reasons against it, but they will not last for ever, and then we shall meet."

"And be married," interposed Agnes.

Evelyn shook her head dubiously.

"I am not so sure of that, dear. Time works so many changes. We may neither of us wish to marry by the time we see each other again. But, however he may come back to me—poor or rich, sick or well, old or young—Will will find me the same—his true and faithful friend."

"And if he should be faithless?" suggested Miss Featherstone.

"He will *not* be faithless," said Miss Rayne abruptly. "You do not know him, or you would not think it possible."

"Oh, Evelyn, what a heart you have," sighed Agnes. "To hear you talk of Mr. Caryll makes me think I don't love Mr. Lyle half enough."

"Your love has not been put to the test yet, Agnes. Should it ever be, I am sure you will prove true as gold. You are in the sunshine of life now, dear, and I am afraid I have been selfish in overshadowing it—even for a moment—with the cloud that darkens mine. Let us forget it, Agnes. Let us think of something else. I should have liked, above all things, to keep you with me; but, of course, now that you have told me this grand piece of news, I cannot renew my request that you should stay."

"But you will come to us instead, Evelyn?" interposed Miss Featherstone eagerly. "I am the bearer of an especial message from mamma to ask you to dine at the Hall this evening. And then you will see my Jasper," she added in a whisper, "and understand how impossible it was for me to help loving him."

"Not to-night, my darling," said Evelyn in a voice of pain.

The revival of her own unfortunate attachment made her shrink, somehow, from witnessing the happiness of her friend.

"Oh, yes, to-night," pleaded Agnes.

But Miss Rayne was firm.

"To-morrow, dear, or next day, but not to-night. I know Mrs. Featherstone sent me the invitation out of kindness, but I am sure she must be tired, and will be glad of rest."

"I thought you would be so anxious to see Mr. Lyle?" pouted Agnes.

"So I am, dear; but after all I have got *you* back again, and that is the chief thing to me. I will dine with you to-morrow, if you particularly wish it, but for to-day—well, I don't mind confessing, my darling, that your news has rather upset me, and I should like to have a few hours in which to reconcile myself to it. You have been so much *my own*, Agnes, and for so many years, it is hard at first to think of giving you up to any one else."

Agnes rose from the sofa and shook out her crumpled finery.

"You will make me begin to hate Mr. Lyle if you talk as if he could come between us," she cried petulantly.

"However, don't let us speak of him any more. There is a small box in the carriage, Evelyn, that I brought home for you. Only a few marble ornaments from Italy, but I knew you would like them for your boudoir mantleshelf. Ask one of the servants to bring them in."

And then the two young women unpacked the case together, and kissed over its contents, and interchanged many a vow of loyal friendship. Yet, when Agnes Featherstone drove away from Mount Eden that afternoon, Evelyn Rayne felt as though she had gone from her, in the old sweet sense, for ever.

CHAPTER XIII.

A CHANCE RESEMBLANCE.

For some time after, she stood at the window from which she had watched Agnes' departure, wrapt in her own thoughts.

What had induced her to mention the name of Will Caryll, and divulge the secret which she had carried patiently and silently in her breast for so many years past? Was it jealous pain at the news of Agnes' happiness that had made her speak out so openly?

She could not answer her own questions. She only felt that the reunion with her little friend had disturbed a wound which she had believed to be closed, and brought back the past in a flood of unhappy remembrance. As Evelyn Rayne stood there, absorbed and alone, she lived the scenes of her dead life over again, and longed to renew them. She saw the first day on which Mr. Caryll had brought Will to her aunt's house, and bargained with her over the price of his board and lodging, and the amount of money to be allowed for his washing. She had thought him a hard and stingy man then—*now* she knew he was only wise and prudent. But Will had always condemned him heartily—Will, with his tall, upright figure, and manly bearing and winning smile—with his handsome face and merry manner! How could her Aunt Maria have disliked him as she did—her poor, faulty, but eminently charming Will?

She smiled—unknown to herself—as she recalled the happy moments when she had slaved for him during his absence, and watched for his return, and been amply rewarded by a smile and a kiss from his handsome, self-satisfied mouth. And her brows were knit till the tears rose to her eyes, as she re-lived, in imagination, that miserable night when he had hid his face in her lap, and confessed the crime of which he had been guilty.

She had shrunk from and despised him then. Her frank and honest nature could not but despise dishonesty, and deception, and fraud; but she had not let him see it. She had worked for him still, even to the moment when she pushed him out of the front door, dressed in her own clothes, and sent him forth into the world to begin a new career. How startlingly distinct appeared that moment to her still. As she gazed out of the window of Mount Eden the leafy avenue, which led to the park, seemed to change to the insignificant by-street in Liverpool, as it looked on that eventful morning—empty and silent from end to end, except for a cat that was strolling homeward, and a caged lark that had wakened with the sun. And *she*, watching—watching—with one hand shading her tear-blinded eyes till that figure which was Will, and yet *not* Will, dressed in her last year's things, had slunk away like a thief (as he was) from the home that had sheltered him, on his road to the early coffee-house and the quay. And she had returned from the last look—alone for ever after! But though he had neither communicated with nor come back to her, his last words were ringing in her ears.

"*You are mine, now, as much as if I had married you, Eve! I shall always consider that, and if I don't come back for years, I shall expect to find you waiting for me, as I shall for you. Will you swear to be faithful to me?*"

And she answered solemnly,—

"*I swear it!*"

"And if uncle comes round," her poor boy had added, "and leaves me Mount Eden, we are to share it together, Eve?"

And with that reminder of a promise they had made to one another on the night of their betrothal, they had separated for ten long years. Was her Will alive or dead? That was the thought that had worried Eve by night and

by day ever since they parted. As soon as she had found herself mistress of Mount Eden, she had wanted to take means to trace her cousin—to advertize for him in the papers, or to place the matter in the hands of the detective police; but her trustees had warned her it would be fraught with danger. Though Mr. Roger Caryll was dead, the firm of Caryll, Tyndall & Masters still survived, and either of the partners had a right to prosecute an offence committed against them all. So she had reluctantly relinquished the idea, and waited to see what time might bring her. And time (as yet) had brought her—*nothing*. And yet Evelyn felt sure that some day she and Will would meet again. If the thought that her youthful lover might have died ever intruded itself upon her, she put it away resolutely. Were Will dead, she must have known it. He had loved her so well. He would have come and told her that hope (for this world) was at an end. God would not have sundered them for ever on earth, without permitting them a solitary farewell glimpse of one another. Will was not dead—she was sure of *that;* but she was not quite so sure why he had not written to her. Her only solution of his silence was, that he still dreaded detection and detention. Oh, if he only knew that his uncle and aunt were both dead, and he might return to England with impunity! For, after Mr. Caryll's death, and her interview with her trustees on the subject, Evelyn had found the forged cheques locked up in an iron safe, and had retained them ever since. The firm might prosecute Will now, if they considered it worth their while, but without proofs they could do nothing to harm him, and she would destroy the proofs directly there was any danger. She did not know why she had not destroyed them already; unless it were that she might some day have the pleasure of seeing Will do so with his own hands. So that he was safe from all the world but her, and safer with her than with all the world.

Her poor Will! How he must have suffered. How gladly she would try to recompense it to him as soon as he was found. Why had she not adopted some more private measures to trace his career, and consulted people who were familiar with his adopted country? He was not a man to be passed over in a crowd. This idea threw her thoughts back to Captain Philip, and his friend John Vernon.

"They have both traveled," she thought to herself, "and yet I have never made use of their knowledge, or tried to extract any information from them. How stupid I have been. I wonder if they are at liberty this afternoon, and would dine with me? I will write and ask them. I feel low and unnerved, and a little company will do me good. I suppose the captain will answer, as usual, *No*, unless his friend persuades him to be sociable. But I can at least try."

And without further discussion with herself, Miss Rayne sat down and scribbled a little note in pencil to Captain Philip, which was put into his hands as he returned with young Vernon from their ride to Leighton. It created quite a commotion in Bachelor's Hall. Evelyn had frequently invited her land-agent to dine at her table when he first came to Mount Eden, but he had been so persistent in his refusals, that she had dropped the courtesy of late and it was more than six months since he had received a similar invitation. He turned the note over and over in his hands, hardly knowing what to make of it.

"Miss Rayne asks you and me to dine at the big house to-day, Jack," he said, in a tone of surprise; "what on earth for? What can she want with you or me?"

"Well I suppose she wants to see us. That is the natural conclusion," replied John Vernon laughing.

Captain Philip thought he detected gratified vanity in the young man's laugh, and turned upon him with sharp jealousy.

"I don't think it's very likely she can want to see *you*, or that she will derive much pleasure from listening to your deep-sea yarns. Miss Rayne has a shuddering aversion for everything connected with the sea. Your name is only included in the invitation because you are staying at Bachelor's Hall. Nor can I imagine what she can have to say to me. We settled all our business this morning. It is very strange."

"Don't let us go," urged Vernon. "Indeed, captain, I am not prepared to appear in the presence of a lady. I have no evening clothes to put on."

Captain Philip laughed.

"Evening clothes, you jackanapes. You would make Miss Rayne stare if you did anything of the sort. Do you suppose *I* have any evening clothes, and, if I had,

that I would wear them? Why Miss Rayne never dresses for dinner herself. I don't believe she has ever worn a low-cut dress in her life. No, no; brush your uniform, lad, and wash your face and hands, and you'll be spruce enough for dinner at the big house."

"But won't Miss Featherstone be there?" demanded Vernon.

"No," replied the captain musingly; "I feel sure Miss Featherstone will *not* be there. Had she stayed the evening, Miss Rayne would have had too much to say to her to require the presence of any third person. I'll tell you what I think it must be, Jack. Some gentleman has called unexpectedly at the big house who Miss Rayne has felt compelled to ask to dinner, and, to avoid the awkwardness of a *tête-à-tête*, she has sent down for you and me to join the paty. She has done it before now. She does not care to sit down with, perhaps, a comparative stranger alone."

"And so you are made a cat's-paw for Miss Rayne's convenience?" observed Vernon indifferently.

"Did I say so, Jack? *I* consider it is treating me more like a friend than a cat's-paw. However, time is getting on. Do you mean to accompany me or not?"

"Of course I mean to accompany you. I am glad of the opportunity to see the inside of the big house, and a little more of its charming owner, and since you think my uniform will do—"

"Oh, bother your uniform!" exclaimed Captain Philip testily. "Who do you suppose is going to look at *it* or *you?*"

After which they walked up to the big house rather silently together, the captain broodily wondering the while if the reason of Miss Rayne's invitation could have any connection with a latent desire on her part to see more of the good-looking young sailor who strolled by his side.

She received them both kindly, but without any great show of cordiality. They found her alone, and she had evidently been crying, for her eyelids were red and swollen and her face very pale. She alluded to the traces of her emotion, as soon as they encountered each other, with a laughing apology.

"You will think, from my general appearance, that I have been worrying myself this afternoon, Captain Philip;

but I have only been having what we silly women call 'a good cry,' and which is the best remedy we know of for over-excitement; for I have had such a great surprise—a joyful surprise, as I am sure it will prove to be. My dear friend, Miss Featherstone, is going to be married."

"Indeed! Miss Rayne. I congratulate her and you. Miss Featherstone will doubtless make an excellent match."

"I don't know whether it *is* excellent, in the ordinary acceptation of the term, but it appears to be essentially a love match, which is, after all, the chief thing. And I have been stupid enough to let the news upset me, Captain Philip; I cannot bear to think of losing my little Agnes after so many years. She could not spend the evening with me, and so (as I feel wretchedly dull), I thought you two gentlemen would be good enough to come and cheer me up a little. I can't tell you how pleased I am to see you here."

"The pleasure is all on our side, Miss Rayne. I am sure Vernon will agree with me in saying so."

"Ah! Mr. Vernon," said Evelyn, turning to the younger man, "I am half afraid I owe you an apology. You began to tell me something about America, I think, this morning, and my head was so full of my poor Gadfly and my cheating grooms, that I had no time to listen. You must let me make up for my rudeness this evening, for I should love to hear all about the places you have visited."

She was attired in a soft, clinging dress of fawn-colored cashmere, relieved at the throat and wrists by lace ruffles, and with a small bouquet of hothouse flowers in the belt at her waist, and she smiled so sweetly at the young sailor as she spoke, that he again thought her the most charming woman he had ever seen, and grew so rosy and confused beneath her glance, he could hardly stammer out an answer to her words.

"You must not judge of me as you see me when I am transacting business," went on the mistress of Mount Eden presently, "for it always makes me abrupt and irritable. I don't suppose women were ever meant to meddle in it, for I am sure it doesn't make them more amiable—does it, Captain Philip?"

"I don't think you would be content to leave it in my hands, Miss Rayne, or that of any man."

"No, I should not; no more than I could bear to sit still whilst anybody drove me. I should long to snatch the whip and reins from their hands, especially in case of an emergency. But don't let us talk of business to-night. I hope you admire the big house, Mr. Vernon? I am rather proud of its adornment, because it is nearly all due to myself. When I entered on its possession, it had little else but bare walls. My poor uncle was so disappointed in all his expectations, he had no heart to finish it."

"It is very beautiful, and very tasteful," replied Vernon, looking round at the walls of the drawing-room, which were hung with pictures.

"Yes, but horribly new, like myself. Yet, like myself also (if I live long enough), it will some day be old—only, with this difference, that age will improve my house, but not me," said Evelyn, with a laugh.

"It is difficult to imagine anything having the power to improve *you*," replied the young man gallantly, for which the captain looked as if he would like to give him a taste of the cat-o'-nine-tails.

"Well, I had no right to expect to get Mount Eden at all," said Miss Rayne, with a sigh, "so I must be satisfied with it as it is. I do not come of an ancient family, you know, Captain Philip. I am one of that contemned class —a *nouveau riche*. My uncle, Mr. Caryll, made his money by the sweat of his brow, and I inherited his earnings for no merit of my own, but only because there was no one else to do so."

"No family was ancient at the beginning. You are destined, perhaps, to be the founder of a long race, Miss Rayne," replied Captain Philip smiling.

What a sudden gloom spread over her features, as though a cloud had overshadowed the sun.

"I don't think so," she said sadly, and then, altering her manner, exclaimed, "but dinner is ready. Let us continue our conversation in the dining-room. No, Captain Philip, I will not accept your arm—thanks—or I should be compelled to leave Mr. Vernon out in the cold. Let us all go in together. It is so much less formal." And she tripped before them lightly to the dining-room.

The big house was (as its mistress had affirmed) rather new, but it was also very comfortable and commodious. If there were no relics of the past about it, it possessed

none of its inconveniences, and the room they not entered was one of the largest and best in the building. The walls were hung with good oil-paintings—several of them being portraits of those that were gone; the furniture was of modern carved oak; the heavy curtains of Utrecht velvet, whilst the floor was covered with a Persian carpet. Everything was handsome, solid, and in good taste, even to the silver bowl of roses that stood in the centre of the table, and the neatly-attired, experienced maid-servants (for Miss Rayne would have no men about her house), who stood ready to wait upon them. The dinner was plain, but excellent; and the hostess dispensed her hospitalities with winning grace. But her conversation was chiefly addressed to Captain Philip, and Jack Vernon soon found his eyes roving round the apartment, scrutinizing the bronze ornaments upon the mantelshelf, and the pictures on the walls. Of these latter, one in particular attracted his attention. It hung over the fireplace, and represented a boy of about ten or eleven years of age, holding the bridle of his pony. The figures were life-size, and exquisitely painted, and Vernon felt as if he could not take his eyes off them. Miss Rayne's soon wandered in the same direction.

"Ah! you are looking at the portrait of my little cousin, I see, Mr. Vernon. Everyone admires it. Is it not beautifully done? It is by the celebrated portrait painter, Buckner."

"Your cousin?" repeated Vernon dreamily.

"Yes. Hugh Caryll, my uncle's only son. He was drowned, poor fellow, during his first voyage. Wasn't it sad? It broke poor uncle's heart. He was never the same man afterwards. I have told *you* all about it, haven't I, Captain Philip?"

"Yes, Miss Rayne, you have told me about it," replied the captain.

But Vernon still continued to gaze at the picture.

"He must have been a pretty boy, mustn't he, Mr. Vernon?" remarked Miss Rayne.

"Yes. And he was drowned, you say? Was he in the merchant service?"

"I think so—I suppose so—but, really, I am not sure, for I never knew my Cousin Hugh, and it happened before I came to live with my uncle. I know he was a very headstrong boy, and ran away to sea, which must have been

very selfish of him into the bargain, for his mother was dead, and his father had set all his hopes upon his only child. It was cruel of him to leave him alone. I always think that if Hugh had lived, I never could have liked him, though he would have been master of Mount Eden, of course, at the head of the family. There is another portrait of him, Mr. Vernon, over the sideboard, taken as a baby; and if you turn round, you will see a third behind you. His poor parents doted on him, and if he had only been half as good as he was handsome, he might have been sitting here at the head of his table to-day."

"His place is far more worthily filled, Miss Rayne. I should hardly think he was worth a regret," said the captain quietly.

"Mr. Vernon would not say so. He cannot take his eyes off his likeness," replied Evelyn laughing.

The young man started, and colored.

"Because the face reminds me so powerfully of some one I have met, and I cannot remember who it is, Miss Rayne. It seems *so* familiar to me. I feel as if I must have known your cousin."

"How strange!" said Evelyn, looking also at the portrait; "could it have been any one abroad? any one you have met in your wanderings, Mr. Vernon?"

"I think it *must* be, for it seems to bring a whiff of the briny with it. I wish I could remember *who* it resembles. These chance likenesses haunt one sometimes."

Captain Philip's voice broke in harshly upon the conversation. He seemed to be jealous of his young friend monopolizing so much of Miss Rayne's attention.

"True; and when, after an infinite amount of useless trouble, you recall the owner of the fancied resemblance, you generally discover that memory has been cheating you, and there is no likeness whatever between them. I should think you might find something better to entertain Miss Rayne with, Vernon, than such silly ideas."

Vernon was about to apologize, when Miss Rayne interrupted him.

"But I don't call them 'silly,' Captain Philip. They interest me, for (do you know) I have often dreamt of the possibility of my Cousin Hugh being alive, and coming back to claim his property. For it *is* his property. I only inherited Mount Eden under the codicil, and the first will

(that left everything to him) is still in existence, and in my possession."

"But so much waste-paper, Miss Rayne, in the face of the later will."

"Not if Hugh were alive, surely; besides, I wouldn't keep it under the circumstances. I should abnegate at once. And uncle never received any certain proofs of his death. He *might* return some day. I should never be surprised."

"But I don't think you'd be pleased, Miss Rayne. How could you bear to give up Mount Eden *now?*"

"Ah, Captain Philip, it won't bear thinking of; but if it were just, it would have to be done. Poor Hugh, he must have suffered enough. Do you think I would keep him out of his own property? Not for ten thousand Mount Edens."

"Well, 'poor Hugh' is not likely to trouble you, I fancy," said Captain Philip gruffly, "and you may rest secure in the possession of your rights. It's very seldom that certain proofs are received of a sailor being drowned at sea; but when a fellow goes under water in the surf of the Bay of Callao (as you have told me your cousin did), and never comes up again, it's as good proof as ever was needed that he's a dead man."

"But he *might* have been saved," continued Miss Rayne, with a woman's pertinacity; "there's no knowing—such things *have* happened—and Mr. Vernon might have met him somewhere in his travels. That's why I want him to try and remember of whom the portrait reminds him. We might find my Cousin Hugh again by such simple means as that."

Captain Philip burst out laughing.

"Forgive me, Miss Rayne. Don't think me rude, but they would be simple means, indeed. If you follow a clue like my friend Vernon's, you may end by relinquishing your property to some one who has no claim upon it at all. A good many people would like to personate 'Cousin Hugh.' We should have another claimant case crowding the law courts. Why, John Vernon here must have been in long clothes when your cousin ran away to sea."

Miss Rayne's face fell,

"Of course! How silly I am. I forgot how young Mr. Vernon is, and really imagined I might have gained a clue to my dream."

"Your dream!" echoed the captain.

"Yes. I have often dreamt that my cousin was alive and came back to Mount Eden. I don't know why I should, except that the story of his unhappy fate impressed me as a child. But you laugh at my romantic ideas, Captain Philip, so I shall not tell you anything more about them."

"Well, I am quite sure that they will never prove anything more than ideas, or dreams, Miss Rayne, and so your friends can afford to laugh at them. Depend on it that Cousin Hugh will never trouble you or any one else in this world again."

"Poor fellow," said Evelyn softly, "don't let us talk of him any more. Tell me of America, Mr. Vernon," and her voice fell to a sadder key as she spoke the word; "have you been there often, and—and—did you meet many of your countrymen there? I have heard there are many English in America, and I have often wished to visit it myself. Tell me all you know. It seems to be such a wide—wide place, as if one might be quite lost out there. What states did you visit? Do you know New York?"

"Better than the rest of America, Miss Rayne, because I have made three voyages out to it and back again. But the captain there and I once made a memorable tour of the Southern States, which lasted three months. I wonder he has never told you of all the adventures we went through during that trip."

"Captain Philip has never told me anything of his past life; he keeps all the fun to himself," exclaimed Miss Rayne, with mock reproach. "He is so absorbed in drainage, and top-dressing, and chemical manures, he does not stop to consider how dull I am up here at the big house all by myself."

"I have nothing to tell, I assure you, Miss Rayne," replied the captain earnestly. "My past life has been as stupid as myself. I am only fit for top-dressing and chemical manures. The 'fun' exists in the vivid imagination of my young friend over there."

"Why, captain, have you quite forgotten, then, the colored belle who followed us all the way from Buffalo to Oil City to ask for a lock of your hair?" said Jack Vernon laughing; "and the lady at St. Louis, who declared she had been married to you in England, and you had deserted her for somebody else?"

The captain reddened under his sun-burnt skin, and Evelyn laughed.

"I am sure *that* must have been a case of mistaken identity, Mr. Vernon," she said, for Captain Philip is a confirmed bachelor. I don't believe he would go ten yards out of his way to see the prettiest girl in England."

"And I am quite *sure* I wouldn't," replied the captain. "I've outgrown such folly long ago."

"If it's not rude, Captain Philip, might I ask what your age is?" said Miss Rayne.

"Forty," he answered, after a pause.

"*Forty!*" she echoed, looking at him fixedly. "Impossible!"

"Why impossible?"

"Because—because you don't look forty, or talk like it, or anything," she returned.

"Perhaps you know best," he said, with an uneasy laugh, as he turned his face away from her scrutiny.

"But we are forgetting—America," continued Evelyn, after a pause. "Is it very wild down in those states? Is it safe for strangers? Do they ever get roughly handled over there—hurt, or wounded, or—or *killed!*"

"*Often*," replied Vernon, with a smile at her ignorance; "indeed, more often than not. The slightest quarrel there is settled with a bowie-knife or a revolver. The captain and I once saw a man shot down like a dog for treading on another's toes in a crowd. Didn't we, captain?"

Miss Rayne closed her eyes.

"How horrible!" she sighed. "People with quick tempers must run a terrible risk out there."

"It is generally short work with them, I can assure you, Miss Rayne. It doesn't do to have a temper in the states."

"And if any one were stranded there, unknown and friendless, would there be any chance, think you, of his drifting so far away from civilization as to be unable to communicate with those at home—to be cut off (as it were) from England, and lost in the wilds of America?"

Her hesitating voice and nervous manner attracted both the men's attention.

"Have you lost sight of a friend in America, Miss Rayne?" demanded Vernon.

She colored like a rose.

"*I?* Oh, dear, no! Who should *I* know on the other side of the world? But a lady—an acquaintance of mine—hasn't heard from her—from her *son* for such a long time, and she is uneasy about him, so I thought—"

But here Evelyn stopped short, unable to proceed further with a subterfuge that was foreign to her nature. Captain Philip's dark eyes watched her narrowly as she played with her dessert knife and fork, and scrutinized the painted flowers on her plate.

"She must indeed be uneasy," replied John Vernon to her remark, "for there are few places out there (if, indeed, any) where postal communication is unknown. Still, I *have* heard of men getting up into the Rocky Mountains, and such like districts, where they have been unable to write home for months together."

"But this is a case of *years*," said Evelyn mournfully.

"Indeed! I don't think I should expect, myself, ever to see a man again who had not written home for years."

There was a painful silence after the last remark, which Captain Philip tried to divert by saying,—

"Is it indiscreet, Miss Rayne, to ask you the name of Miss Featherstone's future husband?"

Evelyn started from her reverie with nervous haste.

"Oh, no! Agnes made no secret of it. She came over here to-day, as proud as possible, to tell me all the particulars of her engagement. His name is Mr. Lyle—Jasper Lyle."

"Any profession?"

"No; at least she didn't say so. He seems to have lived the best part of his life abroad, so I suppose he must be a man of independent means. But we didn't discuss the prosaic part of the matter. We left that to Mr. Featherstone. All I cared to hear was, that Agnes is very happy, and Mr. Lyle (of course) perfection."

"You have not seen the gentleman yet, then?"

"No. Agnes coaxed me very hard to go back to the Hall with her to-day; but I preferred to postpone the meeting till to-morrow. I thought it was too soon to intrude on Mrs. Featherstone's hospitality. But to-morrow I have pledged myself to dine there, and be introduced to Mr. Lyle. Not that I feel at all inclined to welcome him for taking my dear child away from me."

"Is the wedding to be soon, Miss Rayne?"

"I heard nothing of that. I don't think the day is fixed yet, and I hope (for my own sake) that it may not be for a long time. But if we have quite finished, I want to show you the marbles Miss Featherstone brought me from Rome. They are lovely."

The rest of the evening was spent in looking at and discussing the merits of the various possessions of the mistress of Mount Eden; but it was quite early, when the two gentlemen bade her good-night, and strolled back together to Bachelor's Hall.

"Well, what kind of an evening have you spent, Jack?" demanded Captain Philip of his young friend. "Rather too dull and quiet, I expect, for one of your excitable temperament?"

"Not at all, captain; and all the more agreeable, perhaps, from the contrast to my usual life. But I can't get that picture out of my head. It is *so* like somebody I know. I will get at the truth, if I think all night about it."

"Oh, bother the picture," exclaimed the captain. "If it *is* like anybody else, what's the odds? The boy's dead and gone, and the picture is all that remains of him. But didn't it strike you, Jack, that Miss Rayne seemed very anxious for news about America? I have seldom seen her so excited before. Do you think she can have had any possible interest in putting those questions to you?"

"I'm sure I can't say, captain. Women are riddles to me. I don't understand them. But I wish I could remember *whose* eyes it is, of which that picture puts me so powerfully in mind."

CHAPTER XIV.

AGNES' LOVER.

PEOPLE used to say that it was lucky Mr. Andrew Featherstone, the banker, had only one child of his own, for the name of his family was legion. Like most men who have amassed wealth for themselves, he had a score of poor relations, who swooped down periodically, like a swarm of hungry vultures, upon Featherstone Hall, eager to pick up the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table. Some of

them, indeed, had swooped to such advantage as to remain fixtures at the Hall for life ; and strangers had occasionally some difficulty in understanding how so many people with different names came to be congregated under the same roof. Thus Mr. Featherstone's half-brother, by a second marriage of his mother, Mr. William Rastall, had been a permanent visitor at his house for ten years past ; whilst his wife's sister, Miss Macdonald, had lived with them ever since their wedding day. It was a favorite project of Mrs. Featherstone's to marry her sister to her brother-in-law, and get rid of them both at the same time ; but as the pair were incessantly wrangling, there did not seem to be much hope of a speedy consummation of her wishes regarding them. Miss Macdonald had brought in her train Arthur Leyton, the deformed and orphaned son of another sister, who had died in giving him birth, and though the unfortunate boy was now old enough to go to school, he spent all his holidays at the Hall, and added to the complication of names whilst there. The Featherstones, *père et mère*, were not refined either by birth or education. They were honest, and good, and hospitable to a degree, but they were very vulgar. Evelyn Rayne had called herself a *nouveau riche*, but they had far more claim to the title, for, stripped of their wealth, they would have lost all passport to society.

Their daughter was different. She had been trained in a higher school than her parents, and received a better education, and was, in every sense of the word, a lady. And much of this was due to the influence of Evelyn Rayne, with whose refined and sensitive feelings Agnes had been brought so continually in contact. But it must not be supposed, in consequence, that because she knew more than her parents, and spoke and acted in a superior manner to what they did, Agnes Featherstone looked down upon them. *That* was the last teaching she would have received from her friend Evelyn, or, indeed, from her own heart, for she had inherited her father's and mother's kindly disposition, and loved them as dearly as they did her. They were, in fact, a most united and affectionate family, and looked upon Evelyn Rayne as one of themselves. Mr. and Mrs. Featherstone, who were perfectly aware of their own shortcomings, had had an ambition ever since the birth of their daughter to marry her to a gentleman. They

didn't care about his being rich. They had more than enough money for themselves, and Agnes into the bargain. Only they wanted to make sure that their wealth would flow into the proper channel, and raise their children's children into the society of which they only hung upon the borders. It was this idea that had made them give so ready a consent to Agnes' engagement to Jasper Lyle. That he was a gentleman of refinement and education, no one who saw him could doubt, and if he was not possessed of substantial means, Mr. Featherstone did not intend to make that an obstacle to the happiness of his daughter. Mr. Rastall and Miss Macdonald (who had kept house together at the Hall during the absence of its rightful owners) were loud in their denunciations of the new candidate of the Featherstone crumbs. Mr. Lyle was a beggar, and an adventurer, and a fortune-hunter, and everything that was bad in their eyes, and they had no hesitation in saying so—behind his back.

They wondered that the banker and his wife could be so blind to their own and their daughter's interests as to entertain his proposals for a minute. But Mr. Featherstone was firm. "If it were for Agnes' happiness," he said, "the marriage should take place if Mr. Lyle had not a coat to his back. If it were *not* so, he shouldn't have her if he were a millionaire." He had thrown the young people together—perhaps a little imprudently—and they had become attached to each other, and now nothing should separate them except their own free will. He was not going to break the heart of his only child for the sake of a few pounds, shillings, and pence. So the pensioned vultures had to beat a crestfallen retreat, and revenge themselves by pecking at each other.

Mr. Featherstone was right in one respect. It really seemed as if Agnes' heart was so bound up in Jasper Lyle, and his in hers, that it would be a matter of life and death to separate them. Whether it is due to the climate, or the romantic surroundings, or the greater opportunities for intercourse, is an open question; but, certainly, love seems to strike more deeply, and grow more quickly, in the atmosphere of Italy and Spain than in the more prosaic temperature of England. And Jasper Lyle was the first man of intellect and culture with whom Agnes Featherstone had been brought in intimate communion. His store

of knowledge seemed in her eyes illimitable, and his method of imparting it irresistible. He possessed, too, a face and figure calculated to attract the fancy of any woman. He was tall and slight, almost to thinness; but singularly full of grace. His face was long—what his would-be detractors might have termed a "hatchet" face—but it seemed to harmonize perfectly with his pale complexion and languid eyes. He wore his hair, which was wavy, much longer than is usual with Englishmen, and his mouth and chin were completely covered with a beard and moustaches—a dark, silky beard, that had never known the barber's shear, but been permitted to grow untouched, as Nature willed it. Had this beard been shorn off, it would have revealed a weak mouth and retreating chin that augured badly for the happiness of any one whose faith depended on its owner; but the hair curled closely over it, like charity, and hid a multitude of sins. Mr. Lyle's whole appearance, aided by the cut of his clothes, was much like that of a foreigner, to which a distinct accent in his pronunciation of English added peculiar force. He often spoke to his *fiancée* in French or Italian—a proceeding which outraged Miss Macdonald to such an extent, that, on first hearing it, she asked her sister, in her most sarcastic tones, if Mr. Lyle had left his organ and monkey behind him in Italy. But good-natured Mrs. Featherstone was too happy in her girl's happiness to take offence at the insult. She liked to hear the young people talk to each other in French. She was not jealous, though she did not understand one word they uttered. She was proud, rather, to think her Agnes was so clever as to be able to converse with her lover in a foreign language; and considered that the French accent imparted quite a distinguished air to the whole establishment.

And Mr. Lyle doted upon Agnes, and none the less because she was the sole heiress to her father's money. For he had not disguised the truth from Mr. Featherstone that he was a poor man. He was quite frank about the matter. He had a small income—about three hundred a-year—which had been sufficient to keep him abroad, but not at home, and that was the reason he gave for having deserted England for so long. The good-hearted banker had admired his honesty, and promised him it should be no obstacle to his marriage. If Agnes loved him, it was

all-sufficient. Agnes was to be made happy at any cost. And Agnes was in the seventh heaven. All she wanted now, was to bring Mr. Lyle and her dear Evelyn together, and see them the best of friends.

"You *must* love her," she kept on repeating, "as well as I do, Jasper, for she is the dearest creature on the face of the earth. There was never any one like her before—so good, and sweet, and true—and so clever into the bargain. I shall be awfully disappointed if you and Evelyn are not the best of friends."

"*Tiens, ma petite,*" said Lyle, smiling at her earnestness, "if this Mademoiselle Rayne is so very charming, would that be safe? Eh, you laugh at me? You are not, then, afraid of any danger? But I shall want no friend but yourself, Agnes. My little wife must be my best friend."

"Oh, yes," acquiesced Agnes, with a blush, "I know that, darling; but still I could never be happy if you did not like Evelyn. She has been so good to me all my life—I cannot tell you how good—and I hope that we shall never live far apart from one another. Dear, sweet Evelyn."

"How is she like, Agnes, this *chere amie* of yours?"

"*How* is she like? You stupid fellow. *What* is she like, you mean. Oh, tall and fair, with grey eyes and chestnut hair. Aunt Sophy says she cannot see anything in Evelyn; but she's a spiteful old thing, you know, and *I* think her perfectly beautiful."

"And very clevare to manage so large a property all by herself," mused Mr. Lyle.

"She has Captain Philip to help her."

"And who is the Capitaine Philip, *petite?* A lover?" Agnes laughed immoderately in her glee.

"*A lover!* I wish Evelyn could hear you. Why, he's only her land-agent and overseer—the man who takes all the trouble off her hands, you know."

"But she must have lovers, this young lady who is so beautiful and clevare, and, above all things, rich," argued Lyle.

"Indeed she hasn't, then," cried Agnes. "She has always called *me* her little sweetheart; but *now*, I suppose, she will give that up. She *might* have lovers, I am sure—any number of them if she chose—only—"

"Only *what*, Agnes? Finish the story."

"No, I must not. It is a secret. I promised not to tell."

"But to *me, chérie?*"

"Not even to you, Jasper. It is Evelyn's secret, not mine."

"Suppose I guess it? This friend of yours had a lover once—in days gone by—and she has not forgotten him. But is it possible? Does she speak to you of these days?"

Agnes looked into his face astonished.

"Of what days, Jasper? Has any one been telling you?"

"No, no. How could they! It is mere conjecture. But given a lady—young, rich, and handsome, but without admirers, and what is the inference? A lover in the background. That is all."

"How quick you are," said Agnes admiringly. "You ought to write novels. But I can tell you nothing. My darling Evelyn will be here this evening, and then you will see her for yourself."

"And supposing I do not like her—this charming friend of yours—what then, Agnes?"

The girl looked alarmed.

"Oh, but you *must*—you will—you cannot help it," she cried. "All I am afraid of, Jasper, is, that you will like her better than myself."

He twined his long fingers fondly in her soft curls.

"*That* would be impossible, *ma bien aimée.* But with some people, Agnes, I cannot (what the English call) 'get on.' I am not *sympatica*, and it is even on the cards that your Mademoiselle Evelyn will not like *me.*"

"I am *sure* she will," responded Agnes, with tearful earnestness. "Why, it would spoil all my happiness if there was the slightest coolness between you two. What I should like best would be that we should all live in the same house together for the rest of our lives."

Mr. Lyle laughed at her eagerness, but the laugh was not entirely an easy one; and an unbiassed spectator of the scene might have thought he was jealous of the influence exercised over his future wife by her female friend. The conversation left its effects upon Agnes also. It made her feel nervous about the evening's introduction, and on the *qui vive* to note what effect the first sight of Evelyn would have upon her lover. As the time for Miss Rayne's arrival

approached, the girlish figure, robed in some diaphanous, rosy material, flitted between the drawing-room and the hall door, anxious to secure the first word with her friend. Evelyn was true to her time The Hall did not keep fashionable hours any more than the big house, and six o'clock was considered quite late enough for dinner. As the little omnibus that brought her over stopped at the door (she had more than one grand carriage in her coach-house, but she never used them), Agnes flew down the steps to receive her.

"Oh, darling," she exclaimed, "I have been waiting about here for nearly half an hour. I am so nervous, Evelyn, and so excited. Suppose, after all, you shouldn't like him?"

Evelyn (who was shaking out the folds of her black velvet dress and settling the lace about her throat and wrists) stopped short in the operation to regard the girl's flushed and eager face.

"Not like him, Agnes! Are you speaking of Mr. Lyle?"

"Yes. You love me, dear, but our tastes may not always agree; and —and—if you shouldn't think the same as I do about Jasper, it will break my heart."

"You silly child! What difference could it make to your happiness with your future husband? But don't be afraid, Agnes," continued Evelyn gravely; "I am bound to think the very best of anyone you love, for the sake of our long-tried affection."

And, drawing the girl into her embrace, she kissed her fondly. As they disengaged themselves again, they saw a figure standing beside them in the dusky hall. It was Mr. Lyle himself, who seemed to have caught the infection of Agnes' anxiety, and wished to get the introduction to Miss Rayne over before they encountered the many eyes of scrutiny in the drawing-room.

"Oh, here *is* Jasper," cried Agnes, with a gasp. "Jasper, this is my dear friend and sister, Evelyn Rayne. Don't be formal with her. Shake hands at once, and let me feel that you are going to be friends."

"I am quite willing, for my part, to be the best of friends," said Evelyn cordially, as she extended her hand.

Mr. Lyle took it, but for a moment he did not speak. Then he answered, with more decided French accent than usual,—

"I am happy, also, to make the acquaintance of one so dear to Agnes."

"That is right. Now my heart is at rest, and we can proceed in state to the drawing-room," exclaimed Miss Featherstone as she pushed them gaily in front of her.

Evelyn did not know quite what to think. She had not expected Agnes' *fiancé* to be so like a foreigner either in speech or appearance. It puzzled her how an Englishman could ever so far forget what was due to his birthright as to adopt the manners and idiosyncrasies of another nation; and as soon as she had exchanged greetings with the rest of the family, she turned her eyes again upon Mr. Lyle with the keenest curiosity. But he appeared to be shy of her observation (as a lover well might), or to wish to avoid it, for he had withdrawn himself to the farthest portion of the room, and professed to be interested in the pages of a book. And there Evelyn was fain (for the time being) to leave him, for Mr. and Mrs. Featherstone had naturally much to say to their young friend after so long an absence, and she could not be so rude as to allow her attention to wander. At dinner, however, she found herself placed exactly opposite the lovers, and she felt as if she could not keep her eyes off Mr. Lyle. What was it in the man's appearance that so attracted her? She did not admire him—far from it. Her first view of Agnes' lover had been a genuine disappointment. Jasper Lyle was not manly enough to suit her taste. He looked more like a poet or a troubadour than a gentleman of the nineteenth century. And then his hybrid dress and manner of talking rather repulsed her. She liked an Englishman to look and speak like one, and she fancied there was some affectation in Mr. Lyle's pronunciation, and that it was not wholly natural to him. When Agnes had at last drawn her into a conversation with him, Evelyn found her thoughts running in the same channel.

"You must have lived a long time abroad, Mr. Lyle, to have acquired so decided an accent," she said. "Were you born there?"

The simple question seemed to confuse him. He stammered as he replied,—

"Yes—no. That is to say, my mother was French, Miss Rayne; so, you see, I am only half English."

"And you were educated abroad?"

"I have lived there nearly all my life," he answered, with his face bent down upon his plate.

"Well, you've got to turn into an Englishman again now, my boy," exclaimed Mr. Featherstone cheerily, "for mamma and I don't mean to let our little Agnes cross the channel without us. She's all we've got, you know, and we can't spare her out of our sight."

"Then you shouldn't have consented to her marriage with a gentleman that's half a foreigner," snapped Miss Macdonald.

"But Mr. Lyle has promised not to separate us from her," interposed Mrs. Featherstone.

"Surely," replied Mr. Lyle, "Agnes is English, and must remain in her own country."

"And you must become English too, you naughty boy," exclaimed his *fiancé*. "Do you know, Jasper, your pronunciation grows worse instead of better. I really think you are more French to-day than ever. Evelyn is staring with all her eyes at your accent. She never heard anybody speak so badly before. Did you, Evelyn?"

Miss Rayne was indeed staring in the most unaccountable manner at the stranger. Her eyes seemed fixed in his direction, and when Agnes' laughing question recalled her to herself, she turned them in a dazed manner upon her plate.

"Your friend does not like me. I had an intuition it would be so," whispered Mr. Lyle to his betrothed, under cover of the general conversation.

"Nonsense, Jasper," replied Agnes with a look of pain. "Don't take fancies into your head. When you know Evelyn better, you will acknowledge she is the last person to pass a hasty judgment upon anyone. It is only your accent that amuses her a little."

But whether it was due to the presence of Mr. Lyle at the Hall dinner-table or not, Miss Rayne had become unaccountably silent. There she sat, with her fair head crowned with its wealth of chesnut hair, bent down upon her plate, holding commune with herself, or raising it only to steal a furtive glance across the table to where the lovers sat, side by side, talking in a low voice to one another.

"Talk, *talk*, Evelyn!" cried Agnes gaily, after a little while. "What has come to you this evening, darling? You—who are generally so full of life. Have you nothing to say to us after so long an absence?"

"What shall I say?" exclaimed Evelyn, rousing herself at the challenge of her friend. "You are the queen of the feast, Agnes, and should lead the conversation. It is really very embarrassing to be *ordered* to say something. May I make it a question? Have you ever been in America, Mr. Lyle?"

The query came as unexpectedly as a pistol shot, and seemed to startle everybody at table, and especially the man to whom it was addressed.

"What a funny idea," cried Agnes, elevating her brows; "of course he hasn't."

"But why 'of course?'" persisted Miss Rayne, "the journey is nothing now-a-days, and a traveler like Mr. Lyle has probably made it more than once. And I am interested in the States. I have relations there. He may have met them. Have your wanderings led you so far, Mr. Lyle?"

There was a tone in her voice that made Jasper Lyle dread he knew not what, and forced him to raise his eyes against his will. It was the first time Evelyn had fairly met his gaze, and the room seemed to go round with her as she encountered it.

"I—have—not—been—to—America, mademoiselle," he answered slowly.

"Have you *not?*" she asked again, without removing her eyes from his.

As they regarded each other thus, Mrs. Featherstone saw all the color die out of Miss Rayne's fresh cheeks, leaving them of an ashy paleness.

"Evelyn, my dear girl," she cried, rising and passing round the table to her assistance, "what is the matter? Are you ill?"

"I don't feel very well," said Evelyn, in a strange voice. "It is this sudden spring heat that always upsets me. With your permission, Mrs. Featherstone, I will leave the table and await your return in the drawing-room."

"Let me go with you, darling?" exclaimed Agnes, rising from her seat.

But Miss Rayne repulsed her attention with a quick gesture, that was almost one of dislike.

"No, Agnes, don't worry me. I would rather be alone," she said, and then, quickly aware of her injustice, added more sweetly, "Don't make a fuss about it, please, dear. I am only a little faint. I shall be all right in a minute."

But they *insisted* upon making a fuss over her, even down to Aunt Sophy, for Evelyn was a general favorite at the Hall. They had not the tact to perceive that she was suffering from a mental, rather than a physical cause; and they opened the windows and ran for smelling-salts and *eau-de-cologne*, and hovered over her until every servant in the establishment knew that Miss Rayne from the big house was "taken worse." How our friends, with well-meaning stupidity, torture us from time to time in like manner. They will not let us fight our own battles in proud silence, and earn the right to say, "Alone I did it." They pull the weapons we have unsheathed out of our very hands, the visor from our features, the chain armor off our breast, and leave us, stripped and defenceless, in the face of the enemy. They cannot read the dumb, beseeching eyes, and the clasped hands we turn upon them; but question, and comment, and advise, until the last poor barrier is pulled down, and we stand revealed in all our weakness.

Evelyn prayed and protested against the interference of her friends until she could resist no longer, and then pride came to her assistance, and she sat down in her chair again, declaring she was perfectly recovered, and determined to bear everything sooner than break up the family party.

All this time Mr. Lyle had never once raised his eyes to her face, but kept them directed towards the window or the sideboard. Whilst every one else was hovering over her, and doing all in their power to relieve her evident faintness, he kept his seat, and looked the picture of discomfort. But they were too busy with her to notice his behavior. Although she insisted upon keeping her place at the table, the incident that had occurred was so unusual, —Evelyn being anything but of the fainting order of womanhood,—that it cast a certain gloom over the remainder of the meal, and Mrs. Featherstone gave early notice of a retreat to the drawing-room. As soon as she had left the dining-room behind her, Miss Rayne's lassitude gave place to an eager excitement, which accorded strangely with her pale face and lustreless eyes.

"Dear Mrs. Featherstone, *do* let me go home before the gentlemen leave their wine. Indeed, I am not well. It is impossible that I can sit out the remainder of the evening. Pray let me order my carriage, and go at once."

She was trembling all over as she spoke, as if she had got the ague, and Mrs. Featherstone feared she was going to be seriously ill.

"Of course you shall do as you like, my dear; but I wish I could persuade you to stay here for the night instead. The blue room is quite ready for your reception, Evelyn, and I don't think I ought to let you leave the Hall until you are better, or have seen a doctor."

"A doctor!" laughed Miss Rayne. "Oh, nonsense, it's not a case for a doctor. I am only over-tired and over-wrought. Spring is such a busy season on the farm, you know; and I should not have come out at all this evening except for Agnes, and—and—for you."

"Well, well, dear, I won't try to gainsay your wishes, though your return will break up our pleasant evening. But you will come again soon, won't you, Evelyn? Agnes will never be satisfied till you have made the acquaintance of Mr. Lyle, and I don't think you have exchanged a dozen words with him as yet."

"Oh, yes, of course I *must* make the acquaintance of Mr. Lyle," cried Evelyn hysterically. It would never do for *him* and *me* not to be friends—the very best of friends. But if you love me, let me go now—for I am really—not well."

"Jasper shall call your carriage and see you into it," said Agnes, ready to propose anything that should take her back into the presence of her lover. But Evelyn laid her hand upon her arm.

"*No*," she replied firmly, "I will have no one disturbed. I shall walk down to the stables and get into it myself."

They did not oppose her decision, though Agnes insisted upon walking down also, with her arm fondly thrown about her friend's waist. Evelyn kissed her mechanically, and bade her good-night as she mounted into her vehicle; but as soon as she had passed through the drive gates and Featherstone Hall was left behind her, all her enforced calmness gave way, and she sunk back upon the cushions in a storm of grief.

CHAPTER XV.

THE PHOTOGRAPH.

A VERY blank feeling fell upon the party at the Hall after Evelyn's departure.

Agnes was almost in tears (so concerned was she at the behavior of her friend), and Miss Macdonald declared she had no belief in the statement that Evelyn was ill. They had known her now for ten years, and when had she ever been taken ill in this mysterious and affected manner before? No; *her* firm conviction was, that the poor girl had been so upset by the first view of Mr. Lyle, that she could not restrain her feelings. This assertion made Agnes dry her tears, and fire up with indignation. How *dared* Aunt Sophy say such a thing! She was always making some horrid insinuation against Jasper; and it was only jealousy, because she had never been married herself, that prompted her words.

"Jealousy, indeed!" snorted Miss Macdonald. "If an Englishwoman has plenty of money to give away she can always pick up a needy foreigner to accept it. For my part, I hate and distrust foreigners, and always have done so; and I have no doubt that Evelyn shares my opinion, and is terribly disappointed in your choice. That is *my* solution of her refusal to spend the evening here."

"Mamma," appealed Agnes to her mother, "don't let Aunt Sophy insult Jasper behind his back in this manner. You know that he is as much English as we are, and it is absurd she should take a prejudice against him because he has a slight French accent. My darling Evelyn would never be so unjust; I am quite sure of that."

"Evelyn has always been the soul of honor," replied Mrs. Featherstone, trying to smoothe matters; "and, since she said she felt ill, I am certain she did so. And really, Sophy, you are too sweeping in your strictures on Mr. Lyle. I like his accent; I think it is most *distingué*, and if Agnes has no objection to it, no one else has any right to

complain. Come, my dear, kiss your aunt, and let me see you pleasant together. I can't abear to have quarreling in the house."

"I'll tell you what *I* think," said Agnes, after a pause, —"and that is, that it was the sight of my happiness that upset poor Evelyn. Of course she couldn't say so, the darling, but I saw her watching us at dinner with such a look of pain in her eyes, and then I remembered something she told me yesterday about her past life, which must have made the contrast almost too hard to bear."

"What was it, Agnes?" asked her mother curiously.

"I can't tell you, mamma; I promised Evelyn I would tell no one. But you can understand it was the story of a disappointment in love; and that is the reason she has not married all these years. Poor, darling Evelyn! it must have raked it all up to see me so happy and proud of Jasper."

"I dare say you're right, Agnes; but I should have thought Evelyn would have had more command of her feelings. She has always appeared such a brave, determined woman to me. I can hardly imagine her giving way to love-sick fancies. But here come the gentlemen."

Mr. Featherstone's first inquiry entering the room was for his favorite, Evelyn.

"Oh, papa, she has actually gone home. She felt so ill she couldn't stay any longer. Isn't it a disappointment?" cried Agnes.

"I think it is more serious than that," said Mr. Featherstone anxiously. "Evelyn Rayne is not a person to complain without cause. She must be seriously ill. One of you should have gone home with her."

"I wanted her to stay here, but she wouldn't hear of it," replied Mrs. Featherstone. "In fact, she was so unlike herself that we hardly knew her. She seemed to me on the point of bursting into tears, so I thought it kinder to let her have her own way."

"You must send the first thing to-morrow morning to hear how she is," said her husband; "or I will ride over after breakfast, and make the inquiries myself. I shall not be easy till I hear she is all right again. What should we do without the mistress of Mount Eden?"

Jasper Lyle had not joined in the general lamentations; but, as a stranger, it was, of course, not expected of him.

On the contrary, he seemed rather bored by the fuss made over the visitor's departure. But as Mr. Featherstone uttered the last remark, he raised his head.

"Is this Mademoiselle Rayne the real owner of the place you call Mount Eden, then?" he asked of his intended father-in-law.

"Yes. She owns the entire property under the will of her late uncle, Mr. Caryll. It was an immense responsibility to lay upon the shoulders of so young a woman; but Evelyn has proved herself to be quite equal to it. She is a little queen amongst her tenants and farm laborers, and they think there is no one like her. And they are right. I can assure you I have asked for, and thankfully received, many a hint from Evelyn Rayne with respect to the management of my own acres. What do you say to the Women's Rights Bill after that?"

"And she is clever, then?" said Lyle.

"She is more than clever. She has a deep-thinking, practical head, worth two of that of most men, and she has devoted all her energies to her estate. Sometimes I have wondered—"

"What, papa?" demanded Agnes.

"Whether she has not had some latent hope or idea in the background to urge her to make such exertions. It seems almost unnatural a woman should do it for herself alone."

"I know what her hope has been," whispered Agnes to her lover; but he turned his attention again to Mr. Featherstone.

"You have consulted this young lady about your own property?" he said; "is hers, then, the most valuable of the two? Has she the larger experience?"

The banker laughed.

"My dear Lyle, if you nad ever seen Mount Eden, you would not ask such a question. You might put my grounds into a corner of it. It is a magnificent estate, and was purchased, I believe, by the late Mr. Caryll from the Earl of Runmere. It is worth fifteen thousand a year. Why, my little place is a pigmy beside it. And Miss Rayne has the absolute and unconditional control of her property. She is one of the richest heiresses in Great Britain."

"And there were no males in the family?"

"None. Mr. Caryll lost his only son at sea, and this

girl was the sole comfort of his declining years. She richly deserved all he could give her, and he could not have found one to fulfil the trust more nobly. She is a perfect angel of a woman, and we all love her dearly."

Agnes and Mr. Lyle had withdrawn themselves to a distant sofa by this time, where their conversation could not be overheard by the rest of the party.

"I know what dear Evelyn is hoping for," reiterated the girl in his ear—"the return of some one who was very dear to her—a cousin whom she was engaged to, and who went to America. I mustn't tell you any more, because it is a secret, but she says she *knows* he is alive, and will come back to her some day, and then—"

"And then *what?*" demanded her lover.

"She will marry him of course, and give him Mount Eden, and they will be very, *very* happy. At least I hope so," sighed Agnes, "because I am afraid she will never be happy until he does return."

"Do you really think a woman could remember a man for as long as that—ten or eleven years?" questioned Mr. Lyle.

"Oh, yes, *Evelyn* could. She is not like other women. Besides, she told me so herself only yesterday. When I was telling her all about you, and how happy I am; it made her think of Will—poor darling; and she told me the whole story."

"Ah! he will be a lucky fellow when he *does* return," remarked Mr. Lyle, as he rose from the sofa and went out of the room.

Presently he came back with a photograph.

"Can you tell me who that is, Agnes? Have you ever seen the person before?" he said, as he placed it in her hand.

She took it under the gas chandelier to examine it properly. It represented a tall lad of eighteen or nineteen, with eyes that looked dark, set in a beardless face, and a general look of extreme juvenility.

"No," she replied, shaking her head, "*never*."

"Are you sure?"

"Quite sure. Who is it? Any one about here, or some one I met abroad?"

"Some one about here, and some one, also, whom you met abroad," he answered, smiling, as he took it back again. "It represents myself."

"*You!*" exclaimed Agnes, making a dash at the photograph. "Oh, Jasper, it is impossible. It is not a bit like you. Do let me see it again."

"No," replied Mr. Lyle, holding it beyond her reach, "it is not worth a second glance. I was only making a little experiment on you. An old friend who met me abroad declared I had altered so little he should have known me anywhere, whilst I flatter myself I am not the same man I was a few years ago. I have made you the umpire, and I am satisfied. I am right, and my friend is wrong. I am very glad of it."

"But let me keep the photograph," urged Agnes; "it is interesting to me, Jasper. I like to know what you looked like so many years before I knew you. I am jealous of those years, dear. It seems as if I had been shut out from them."

"No, no," replied Lyle, "it is of no use. I do not wish it kept; it is too ugly. I don't know why it was not destroyed long ago. I should be sorry to look like that now."

Thereupon ensued an amicable quarrel between the lovers; Agnes Featherstone trying to regain possession of the photograph by force or strategem, and Jasper Lyle to keep it from her. At last she gave up the contest almost tearfully.

"It is too bad of you," she pouted; "you might let me have it, when I tell you it is of value to me. Why, Evelyn has the portraits of her cousins—especially Hugh—since they were little babies, and she wouldn't part from them for all the world."

"Has she shown them, then, to you?" exclaimed Jasper Lyle quickly.

'Not all, perhaps—but the oil paintings hang in the dining-room. Oh! *why* did you do that?" she cried, breaking off suddenly, as she saw him tear the photograph he held in two, and fling the pieces into the fire, which the chilly spring evenings still rendered necessary; "and when I told you I wished to keep it."

"And I said I did not wish you to do so," returned Jasper Lyle.

This little episode, combined with Evelyn's departure, seemed to break up all the harmony of the evening, and the party retired to rest at an earlier hour than usual. As Mr. Lyle reached his room, he rang the bell.

"Did you ring, sir?" inquired the servant who answered the summons. (By the way, why do servants invariably ask *if* you rung, when they have come upstairs because they heard the bell? It appears to be "servants' hall" etiquette to do so, but it is very unnecessary.)

"Yes," replied Lyle, "I want you to call me early to-morrow morning—quite early—at six o'clock. I am going for a long walk."

"Very good, sir," said the man, who proved true to his trust, and brought up the boots and the warm water punctually to the time desired.

Lyle dressed quickly, and went downstairs. It was a lovely morning—the precursor of one of the first warm days in May—and all Nature seemed to be alive. The flower-beds of Featherstone Hall had just been laid out for the season, and the rows of variously-tinted foliage-plants, from the palest velvety green to deep claret color, contrasted vividly with the white and red geraniums, and yellow calceolarias, and purple heliotrope with which they intermixed. Everything about the hall was perfectly organized, and bore the stamp of wealth; but it was more for show than use. It swallowed money, but it yielded none. Yet it impressed most people with its magnificence, and none more so than the needy man who now surveyed it.

"And all this," he thought, as he looked around him and saw the glass of the hot-houses and conservatories glistening in the distance, and heard the "hissing" of the grooms as they attended to their charges in the stable-yard, "all this is as nothing compared to the riches of Mount Eden. It would only occupy a little corner of it. That is what Mr. Featherstone said. And it is actually all *hers*. What a fool I was to be in such a hurry!"

He turned and walked on rapidly, for he did not wish his morning stroll to be patent to all the world. When he had traversed about half a mile, he met a laborer, and stopped him.

"How far is it, my friend, from here to Mount Eden?"

"Not know Mount Eden?" grinned the rustic. "Ye mun be a stranger in these parts. Whoy, ye're on Mount Eden ground now."

"Indeed! But where's the house?"

"The big house? That's a matter o' a mile further on."

"A mile? And do these fields belong to the estate, then?"

"Aye, aye; on either soide, and as fur as ye loike to look, and further than ye'll care to walk. It's a foine estate, Mount Eden—the foinest in all Hampshire."

"And will this road lead me to the house?"

"Aye, aye! Go on straight till yer come to the cross roads, and the left 'ull take ye up the drive gates. That's it, master."

"Thank you, my man," said Lyle, as he commenced to walk briskly on.

The rustic looked at his empty palm, and scratched his head.

"Any 'un could tell *'e* was a furriner," he soliloquized, as he trudged on again. "An English gentleman would ha' known that a feller would feel dry arter all that talking."

Meanwhile Jasper Lyle pressed forward till he reached the drive gates of Mount Eden, which were guarded by a pretty Gothic lodge. A woman came out whilst he was loitering there, and asked him if he wanted to see any one up at the big house.

"I should like to walk through the grounds," he said, "if you think Miss Rayne would have no objection. I have the honor of her acquaintance," he added.

The woman smiled pleasantly.

"Oh, I am sure, sir, if you're a friend of Miss Rayne's, she would have no objection in the world. It's a good step up to the house, but you can't miss it if you go straight on."

And she held the gate open for him to pass through as she spoke.

The approach to Mount Eden lay through wooded and park-like grounds, where the thick carpet of ferns served as a covert for the fallow deer that sprung up every now and then at the sound of the stranger's step. This was the front approach. The back entrance lay through that nursery of firs and larches, where John Vernon had first met Miss Rayne, with her hands full of violets.

Evelyn preferred trees and ferns to flowers. She had a few beds laid out close to the house, but when she wished to wander by herself, and think over the business that engrossed her mind, she invariably chose the park, with its soothing shade—the sound of the singing of birds, and the scent of the freshly-trampled ferns—in preference to her flower garden. Everything seemed too bright and gaudy

there to be in sympathy with sombre thoughts, and Evelyn's thoughts had always been more serious than gay.

As Jasper Lyle walked through the park road, the sudden bound of a fawn, or the rush of a rabbit, would make him start, and look furtively around. He did not want to meet the mistress of Mount Eden until she invited him to do so. Curiosity had drawn him to view her estate; but he did not wish Miss Rayne to think him either impertinent or obtrusive. So he picked his way cautiously, until he came in sight of the big house, when he slipped behind a tree, and surveyed it at his leisure. In his eyes it seemed to be the most beautiful place he had ever seen. It was a long, low building of grey stone, supported by white porticos and pillars, somewhat in the Italian style of architecture, and ornamented on the southern side with a large orangery, which gave it an un-English-like appearance. A circular lawn, shaded by cedar and mulberry trees, lay in the front; whilst from the back, a wide terrace, with balustrades, led down to the flower garden. On one side stood the stables and coach-houses, well concealed from view by spreading horse-chestnut trees, now in full blossom; whilst on the other, the walled-in fruit and vegetable garden, with its long line of forcing-houses, served as a boundary for the dairy and poultry farm, which was situated just beyond. Bachelor's Hall was not to be seen from this point of view. It lay a quarter of a mile in the rear, close to the pheasant preserves, and was as secluded as if no big house were in existence. Mr. Lyle stood behind the friendly tree for a long time, surveying the evidences of luxury and comfort by which he was surrounded.

"Fifteen thousand a year, and this estate," he thought, as he drew a long breath, "and all in her own hands. It makes me sick to think of it. I deserve to be killed for having thrown away my chances in this manner. She recognized me—I am certain of it. I knew it directly I met her eyes, and it was on that account that she returned home. Now, the question is, *how* did my presence affect her? I should have had no doubt on the subject if it had not been for what Agnes told me. I never dreamt that Evelyn could have remembered such a boy and girl affair—the veriest shadow of a courtship. But if she does, what then? I think I know what women are by this time, and can pretty well calculate the effects of an interview. At

all events I'll try it. And in any case it would be necessary, for I must secure her friendship and good services with the Featherstones. Suppose she should betray me? No! *That* is impossible!"

At this moment, a kind of vision seemed to pass before his mental eyes, and silently repeat the word "*impossible!*" Only the picture of a young girl dressing him in her own clothes, and pressing her money to the last farthing upon his acceptance, and parting from him with straining eyes and quivering lips, but brave to the last, for fear of a betrayal. It made him shudder as he recalled it, and feel as if he had been guilty of treachery, but it relieved his mind. The Evelyn who had been his salvation in the years gone by would not turn against him now. And he resolved to put her courage and determination once more to the test. He left his hiding-place (when he had satisfied himself that the extent of the property had not been exaggerated to him), and began to take his way back to Featherstone Hall. How small and mean everything about it appeared, in comparison with the statelier grandeur of Mount Eden. He felt as if he despised the "ribbon" floriculture, and the very young trees and bushes, and all the signs of a newly-acquired wealth that lay about the Hall. He had thought it magnificent on his first arrival. Now, side by side with the other estate—the estate which should have been his—it appeared superficial and tricky. He curled his lip with contempt as he passed through the elaborately laid-out flower garden, with its white statues and urns, and its wire-work arches of roses and clematis, into the breakfast-room. It was nine o'clock by this time, and all the family were assembled there, wondering why he did not join them.

"Oh, Jasper!" cried Agnes, rising to receive him, "where *have* you been? We have sent up twice to your room to tell you that breakfast was ready."

"John could have told you that I had gone for a walk this morning, Agnes. Your English hours rather upset my habits. In Italy we rise early, and seek the morning air before the sun becomes too hot, and I do not know what to do with myself after the day breaks."

"Dear me," said Mrs. Featherstone, "if you had only said so, Mr. Lyle, I would have ordered breakfast to be prepared earlier on your account. You must not go out another morning fasting."

"And if you had told *me*, Jasper," added Agnes reproachfully, "I would have gone too. I should love to take a morning walk with *you*. Shall you go out every morning?"

"I do not know, *chérie*, but I am at your service whenever you command it. But suppose (now I am here) that you give me some breakfast. The air has made me hungry."

"But where have you been?" urged Agnes.

Lyle shrugged his shoulders after the French fashion.

"How can I tell you? Every road is strange to me about here, and they all look the same. I walked through beautiful green fields, and by hedges of wild flowers, such as are to be found nowhere but in your happy England—that is all I know."

"But did you go to the right or the left after you turned out of the drive gates?" persisted Agnes.

"Well, really," interposed Miss Macdonald, "I think it becomes quite indelicate, Agnes, to question a gentleman in that pertinacious manner. How do you know that Mr. Lyle has not his own reasons for keeping silence on the subject? If he had wished for your interference he would have acquainted you with his design."

"Oh, rubbish!" cried Agnes irreverently; "what can *you* know about it, Aunt Sophy. As if Jasper would ever have any secrets from *me*. As if it can be of any consequence *where* he walked—excepting that I wish to know."

"You should go over to Mount Eden if you want a nice morning walk," said Mrs. Featherstone; "the approach through the park is beautiful, and there is a charming dell in the middle of it."

"Fairy dell! Oh, it's the loveliest little spot," said Agnes. "Jasper, you must let me take you there. It was there I first met my darling Evelyn, and she was crying."

"Can the owner of Mount Eden possibly have anything to cry for?" demanded Mr. Lyle.

"Indeed she had; though I was only a little child at the time, and knew nothing about it. But she was very unhappy when she first came to live with her uncle, and I don't think she ever liked him much. Who could? He was such a nasty, grumpy old man."

"You shouldn't say that, Agnes," remarked Mr. Featherstone reprovingly. "Mr. Caryll was a very unhappy and disappointed man, and that is enough to make people seem (what you call) 'grumpy.'"

"Well, papa, he never made Evelyn happy; and she couldn't love him because he had been so unjust and unkind to her Cousin Will."

"A good-for-nothing rascal, who first forged his uncle's name and embezzled his money, and then bolted to America, or somewhere. I don't think Evelyn can have any sympathy with a fellow like that. She is too good and upright herself."

"Evelyn never told me that her cousin had done anything *wrong*," said Agnes, with solemn eyes. "She has never said a word against him, so perhaps she doesn't know it, or it may not be true."

"It *is* true," replied her father. "All Liverpool knew the story; and if the young rascal hadn't got away, the firm would have prosecuted him for the offence. And I expect that Evelyn knows all about it into the bargain, but the boy was of her own blood, and so she hides his delinquencies from the world. Quite right, too—Evelyn all over. She is nothing if she is not loyal."

"Did you ever see the young man you speak of, Mr. Featherstone?" demanded Lyle quietly.

"Never, my dear Lyle, nor did I want to do so. He was only a junior clerk in Caryll's office,—a boy who ran errands and swept out the place,—and my wonder is how he ever had the assurance to commit such a crime. However, it has long since been forgotten, and Agnes should not rake up such unpleasant subjects."

No one continued the conversation, and, as soon as breakfast was over, Lyle escaped to his own room.

"It is growing too warm for me," he thought. "My existence is not forgotten, and Evelyn still speaks of me to strangers. I must find out at once if she means to be my friend or my enemy."

And so he sat down and wrote a few lines to the mistress of Mount Eden, which he bribed a groom to carry over to her in the course of the day.

CHAPTER XVI.

A HOPE'S FRUITION.

MEANWHILE, Evelyn Rayne had passed through a night full of restless and variable emotion. She hardly knew if she were miserable or happy. She felt as if she were being torn in pieces with the contention of her feelings, and the shock she had experienced had unsettled her reason. To have hoped, and prayed, and remembered, and trusted for ten long years, and then to have realized the fruition of her prayers in so startling and unexpected a manner. It was enough to make any woman feel as if she were going out of her mind. She sat on the side of her bed, with both hands pressed tightly against her throbbing head as she tried to disentangle and arrange her thoughts, and review the situation in which she found herself, with some degree of calmness. Will was alive—that was the first truth with which she had to become familiar. He had not died (as she had so often feared) alone and friendless in some far off jungle, with no familiar face near him to soothe his last moments. He had lived, and apparently prospered, and he had—*forgotten her!* What had he been doing all this while? Where had he been hiding? How came he to appear before her without a word of warning, in the garb of a gentleman—honored, flattered, and received as one of themselves into the bosom of the family of her most intimate friends?

Here a sudden revulsion of feeling took hold of her, and she was ready to reverse all her former opinions, and to declare that she had been utterly mistaken. She *must* have been mistaken. She had been led away by a chance resemblance. It *couldn't* be Will. Mr. Jasper Lyle—who had been reared in Italy until he had nearly forgotten his mother tongue, who was a man of means and education, who was engaged to be married to Agnes Featherstone, and who had placed himself in Evelyn's path without a shadow of distrust or fear—the

same person as her Cousin Will who had absconded from England, branded with felony? *It was impossible.* Why poor Will would have been afraid to put his foot within twenty miles of Mount Eden, until he knew it would be safe to do so. The idea was too wild to be entertained for a moment. Then *what* was it that had so upset her, and filled her mind with sick misgivings that appeared incontrovertible? *One* look from Mr. Lyle's eyes across the dinner-table. *One* look, during which his soul and hers had seemed to gaze at one another through open windows, and to reveal everything which the conventionalities of the world had hitherto concealed. *One* look, during which her little friend's *fiancé* and the stranger-guest had entirely disappeared, and she stood alone with Will Caryll and the unforgotten past. *That* was what had made her head whirl and her brain spin, and sent her back to Mount Eden in a state bordering on delirium. But when she came seriously to review her feelings and their cause, her calmer reason made her doubt the justness of her decision. Perhaps the sight of Agnes' happiness, and the fact that it had made her speak of Will, may have conjured up a likeness that existed only in her own imagination. For (when she came to consider it) Mr. Lyle was not a bit like her missing cousin—except in the eyes and nose. It was true that she couldn't see his mouth, and his forehead was pretty well concealed by the fashion in which he wore his long, wavy hair, and his figure would (under any circumstances) have altered with the intervening years; but would Will even have ventured to return to England without giving her warning of his intention? Evelyn had always believed he would come back some day. She had pictured receiving a letter written from some distant, foreign place telling how he had prospered (or otherwise), and asking if it would be safe for him to show his face in Hampshire, and if he were sure of a welcome there. And she had meant to write him back—oh, such a lovingly reproachful letter, telling him of all that had occurred during his absence, and begging him to hasten home and share Mount Eden with her, for there was no fear of his crime being brought home to him then. Mr. Caryll had been the head of the firm whose monies the young miscreant had embezzled, and the forged cheques had been returned to his hands. He had retained them,

intending to hold them *in terrorem* over the head of his nephew in case he ever presumed to ask assistance of him again; and when he died Evelyn had found them (as had been said) amongst his private papers. She had not destroyed them even then. She had dreamt—silly woman—of a happy moment when she might see *her husband* destroy them with his own hand, and fold her in a grateful embrace directly afterwards. As she recalled it, the hot tears trickled from her eyes and ran through her clasped fingers. It was of no use fighting against her internal conviction. If Mr. Lyle were not her Cousin Will, he was so like him that she felt as if she could never be easy in his presence again. Yet, though she had passed the night in arguing with herself, and trying to account for the delusion which seemed to have fastened on her, Evelyn rose as puzzled *what* to believe as when she retired to rest, and ill and harassed by the uncertainty. It was her usual custom to have her saddle horse brought to the door at nine o'clock each morning, and to ride round the farm and the premises in company with Captain Philip. These rides were a source of both pleasure and profit to her. They enabled her to become acquainted with every rood of her estate—to superintend the agricultural operations to the farthest extent of it, and to let her farm laborers and tenantry know that the eye of a master was over them at all times. And she greatly enjoyed the conversations she held with Captain Philip the while. Although her senses were keen, and she possessed remarkable powers of comprehension and judgment, Evelyn was not too proud to learn, nor too conceited to be aware, that her land-agent knew a great deal more than herself. So that these morning rides, which took place with scarcely any intermission throughout the year, were looked forward to by both of them, and it was quite a subject of wonder when Miss Rayne sent her horse round to the stables again on this particular morning, with a message to Captain Philip that she was tired, and did not intend to accompany him. The Captain's face fell a couple of inches when the message was delivered.

"Not going out?" he repeated blankly to the groom in attendance; "why, what's the matter with her?"

"I don't know as there's anythink the matter with the missus, sir," was the reply. "Only the maid says she feels tired-like, and don't want to ride on horseback."

"It's very strange—very unlike her," muttered the captain, pulling his moustaches. "Why we were to have seen the men digging the new decoy this morning. Well," with a quickly-checked sigh, "I suppose I must go by myself."

And he turned his horse's head, and went very slowly and thoughtfully down the long drive.

When he had quite disappeared, Evelyn was half sorry she had refused to accompany him.

"After all," she thought, as she commenced to busy herself about the house, "thinking won't solve the mystery. I must wait the course of events. Most probably I have been frightening myself with a bogie of my own creation. I should have gone out with Captain Philip, and blown my absurd fancies away."

She walked up to her private sitting-room, and, unlocking the drawer of an old marquetrie cabinet, turned out its contents into her lap. They were not very numerous, but they had been her dearest treasures for many years past. There were a dozen letters, perhaps, scrawled in an unformed, boyish handwriting, a battered fusee-box, a pair of soiled kid gloves, several bunches of dried flowers, and a couple of photographs. It was these last mementos of her cousin that Evelyn was in search of. One of them was a duplicate of the picture that Jasper Lyle had thrown into the fire at Featherstone Hall, and was as totally unlike his present appearance as anything could well be. Taken by a third-rate photographer, and at an age when a lad seldom displays any of the characteristics of feature and expression that change with his growth, and individualize his fuller manhood, it bore no resemblance whatever to Mr. Lyle, and Evelyn smiled as she held it in her hand.

"Yes, that is my own dear Will," she thought, "just as he looked before he yielded to that terrible temptation, and drove all the courage and manliness out of his face. But how could I have ever imagined that Mr. Lyle resembled him? I have been dreaming. They are not in the least alike."

The smile actually came back to her lips, and the light to her eyes, as she scanned the photograph, and after she had regarded it earnestly for several minutes, she kissed it and everything else in the drawer.

"His dear gloves!" she murmured. "I remember the

very day he put them on, and how I scolded him for buying such an extravagant color as lavender. And his poor, little, battered fusee-case, which he forgot to take with him! Poor darling, he was too frightened to think of anything but his chances of escape on that terrible night. Ah, Will," with a heavy sigh, "how happy we might have been for all these years, had you only been more strong."

She took up the other photograph, which represented her cousin at an earlier age, with his head held down, and his eyes looking up, but threw it from her quickly. Something in the attitude and expression (though taken some years before the other) reminded her of Mr. Lyle, when they had gazed in each other's eyes the night before.

"I am growing nervous again," she said, with a faint laugh. "This is too much of a good thing. I shall fancy I see uncle's ghost walk into the room next, or something equally sensible. I must shake myself together, and repress my too vivid imagination with some hard work."

She locked the drawer, with its contents, as she spoke, and rose to leave the room. But on the threshold her maid, Anna, confronted her with a sealed letter.

"From the 'All, Miss," she said, with Arcadian simplicity, as she delivered it.

Evelyn turned it over with a trembling hand. It was not from Agnes, nor from any one with whose writing she was familiar.

"Who brought this?" she demanded nervously.

"One of the Featherstone helpers, Miss. The foreign gentleman, Mr. Lyle, gave it to him, and he was to wait for an answer."

"Very good, Anna. You can leave me. I will ring when my answer is ready," replied Evelyn, in jerky, disconnected sentences, as she walked away from the servant's observation.

But as soon as the door had closed upon Anna, she tore the letter open vehemently. What did it contain of good or ill for her? Here was, at least, she felt, the contradiction or confirmation of her suspicions, and she must know the truth at once. The first word told her all.

"I see that you have recognized me, and feel that my future lies in your hands. When can I see you, and explain everything? Grant me an early interview, and, for the sake of the past, keep silence until we have met. I have so much to tell you and to ask your pity for."

That was all—no address and no signature, but he knew she would need neither to convince her of his individuality. As Evelyn read the words and saw the arguments with which she had tried to combat her own conviction of the truth crumble into dust before them, she was conscious of only one thing—that she must see him face to face, and learn everything he had to tell her. She stumbled like a woman walking in her sleep to her writing-table, and scribbling on a sheet of paper, "This afternoon, at three o'clock," she put it in an envelope, sealed and addressed it to Mr. Jasper Lyle, and rang the bell for Anna.

"Here is my answer," she said calmly; "send the groom back to the Hall with it at once, and tell him to deliver it without delay to Mr. Lyle. And should any one else ask for me, Anna, this morning say that I am busy, and cannot be disturbed; and do not come back yourself unless I ring for you."

She watched the maid take the note, and when she had disappeared, she rose and deliberately locked the door after her, and then, flinging herself down upon the sofa, she fell into an abandonment of grief. All her sophistries, her arguments, her self-deception were of no avail now. She knew for a fact that she had not been mistaken, and that her lover, William Caryll, and she had actually stood face to face again; that the trembling criminal whom she had assisted to evade the law had ventured to return into the very jaws of the lion—no longer trembling nor dependent, but holding up his head as though he were entitled to universal respect, as the future husband of Agnes Featherstone. Evelyn was a faithful and loving woman, but she was also a very proud one, and Agnes was one of the deepest affections of her life. She possessed the courage which would have made her spurn all the conventionalities of the world, to unite her own lot with that of a man who was *known* to be guilty, so long as he had remained true to her. But when she thought of her pure and innocent Agnes, who was almost a child in years and experience, being linked for life (unknowingly) to a *forger*, all her sense of right and justice rose up to prevent it. Will Caryll creeping back to her feet for forgiveness (however long the silence and separation that lay between them), would have been welcomed like the prodigal son in the Scriptures, and laden with the best gifts her means could afford him. But

Jasper Lyle, taking advantage of the ignorance of her friends to become the betrothed of their daughter; presuming (with that disgraceful past behind him) to link his pretended name with one that had never been dishonored, and to flaunt his undeserved happiness and prosperity in her face—*that* was quite another thing. Every woman will understand the feelings of burning indignation and mortified pride with which Evelyn recalled such facts. They dried up her tears to their very source, and made her ashamed that she had given way to them. What was needed now was courage and action; not weak sentiment for an unworthy past. She had thought she should need hours of solitude to brace herself for the proposed interview, but as the truth forced itself on her consideration, she determined that Will Caryll, or Jasper Lyle, or whatever he chose to call himself, should never guess now how many tears she had shed during his absence, but meet her as a judge to whom he was bound to give an account of himself. Anna, who had informed the parlor-maid that the mistress's head "seemed very bad, and she didn't think as how she'd come down to luncheon," was surprised to see her descend at the sound of the gong, serene and composed as usual, and attired with more than the attention she ordinarily bestowed upon her toilet. It is true that she didn't make a hearty meal, and that more than once, as her rebellious thoughts flew backward, her lip quivered, and she was forced to swallow some obstacle that seemed to have risen in her throat, but she sternly repressed all symptoms of emotion, and compelled herself to take what she considered necessary to maintain her fortitude. When the meal was over she returned to the room that held the marquetrie cabinet, and directed Anna, when Mr. Lyle arrived, to show him up there. And then she stood, a tall, graceful figure, robed in black silk, gazing from the window that looked out upon the park, watching for the advent of Will Caryll.

When she saw him from a long distance off, riding slowly up the avenue, she turned very white, and shuddered. The shock of discovery that Will had actually returned was over, but now came the pain of standing face to face with him, with the full knowledge that it was *he*. For a moment, a spark of the old tenderness revived in Evelyn's breast, and she felt as if she were about to meet *her lover;*

but with the next recollection poured back upon her like a flood, and she was conscious only of the fact that Jasper Lyle had dared to aspire to the hand of Agnes Featherstone. At that thought she commenced to walk rapidly up and down the room, as though to try and walk off her indignation, lest, before his mouth was opened, she should have said words she could never recall. She was still in rapid motion when Anna announced Mr. Lyle, and her cousin entered the room. He looked very humble and crestfallen as she first caught sight of him, but as soon as the door had closed behind him and they were alone, he plucked up courage and advanced towards her.

"Eve!" he exclaimed, holding out both his hands, "my dear cousin Eve, and so you actually knew me! You found me out—"

But Evelyn bid not make any attempt to grasp the proffered hands. She stood still where she had been when he entered—her handsome face and figure relieved by the dark background of the marquetrie cabinet.

"Yes," she answered, looking him full in the face, "I *have* found you out, Will; and my only wonder is, how you can ever have expected to hide yourself from me under the flimsy veil of dyed hair, an assumed name, and false antecedents."

"I never thought we should be brought in contact, Eve. It was not till I arrived in Hampshire that I learned that Featherstone Hall and Mount Eden were within a stone's throw of each other, and that my friends were so intimate with you. When I *did* hear it, I hoped that the length of time we have been separated, and the alteration in my speech and appearance, were sufficient to permit me to pass as a stranger with you until the time came for a confession of the truth, for I had no intention of concealing my identity from you for ever, Eve. I should have made myself known to you, by-and-bye, but I did not imagine your sight would be so keen."

"Or my memory so retentive," she replied sarcastically; "I can understand that. You judged me by yourself, but you were mistaken, Will, and now that further disguise between us is useless, I must have an explanation from you. How long is it since you returned from America, and why do I find you masquerading under an assumed name at Featherstone Hall?"

William Caryll began to resent his cousin's manner towards him. He had always been of a weak and irritable disposition, that carped against authority or fault-finding, and, half forgetful of the past, he was fool enough to lose sight of his danger in the present, so he asked her, sulkily, what business it was of hers.

"It *is* my business, as I will soon prove to you," returned Evelyn spiritedly. "Do you suppose I am going to be a party to your deception? To meet my cousin, knowing *who* he is, and *what* he is—in the house of my most intimate friends, day after day, and pretend to think he is a stranger? You don't know me yet, Will Caryll, or you would not have asked me that question."

"Do you mean to say you will betray me?" he cried in alarm.

"I do not know yet *what* I shall do, Will. I have not made up my mind. I am waiting to hear, first, what account you can give me of yourself. For ten years you have kept total silence between us. Now, I must know all—*all!*"

And Evelyn clenched her teeth together as she spoke.

"I will tell you all—everything," he rejoined deprecatingly; "I will not conceal a single fact from you, if you will only stand my friend. You ought to be my friend, Evelyn, not only for the sake of the past, but because you can afford to be so, for, if it hadn't been for that cursed piece of boyish stupidity of mine, you would not be the owner of this magnificent place to-day. You must know that, and I think you owe me something for having helped you to it."

"I am not aware that I have ever proved *less* than your friend," replied Evelyn, as she bit her quivering lip. "Had I not done so, you would not be standing before me now."

"That is just it!" he exclaimed, taking advantage of her evident emotion. "You were so fond of me, dear, and helped me so kindly in the days gone by, that I feel sure you will not do less for me in the present."

Evelyn cast him one look of disdain from her superb eyes, and motioned him to a seat.

"Sit down," she said, "and tell me all the truth. We can settle nothing till I am in full possession of it."

"But may I not tell you first," he pleaded, "how glad I am to see you? You mustn't think I had forgotten you,

Eve, or anything you did for me; but I little thought we should ever meet again, and I hardly recognized you at the first glance. You have altered tremendously. You are so —so *very* much improved. You are quite a handsome woman, Eve, but I always prophesied you would be, didn't I?"

Her lip curled.

"I really don't remember, Will, and it is of little consequence if you did. But this has nothing to do with the matter in hand. How is it that I have found you at Featherstone Hall?"

"You want to know," he replied, looking and feeling very small, "why and how I am here, and call myself Jasper Lyle instead of William Caryll? It is very simple, and easily told. When I went out to America, ten years ago, I worked at anything and everything, so long as it put bread in my mouth. I was a porter, a bootblack, and a waiter by turns. I sold tickets at a skating rink, and chopped wood for the winter, until, after a year or so, chance took me down to the Southern States, where I became the personal attendant of a planter called Lyle. He was very rich, very old, and a great invalid. He found I had been born and brought up to be something better than a servant, and he took a fancy for me, and treated me as a friend and companion. I lived with him for three years, and then he died, and left me five thousand pounds. I purchased an annuity with it—adopted his name—and went to Italy, where I have lived ever since, not knowing how far it might be safe for me to return to England. That is the whole of the story."

"And you never wrote me one line," said Evelyn reproachfully. "You left me to suppose that you were dead, or in want and poverty, whilst you were living the life of a gentleman in Italy. You have not shown much consideration for *my* feelings, Will."

"Well," he answered uneasily, "what would you have had me do? How was I to know you would care to hear from me? I had left England under a cloud, and I thought the best thing was to let the matter die out. Letters are very dangerous, you know. I could never tell into whose hands they might fall, nor (with so vindictive an old fellow as Uncle Roger) what might not be the consequence of their miscarriage. I believe, if I had escaped to heaven, he would have tried to hunt me out of it again."

"You are wrong!" cried Evelyn; "Uncle Roger was neither mean nor revengeful. I think he behaved most generously to you, Will. It was the firm that decided to prosecute you, and the firm still exists. Poor uncle never said an unjust word against you to the day of his death. I am witness to that."

"But he never left me anything," said Will Caryll. "He gave you the whole of this valuable estate without a thought of me, who was just as much related to him as you were. He might have halved it whilst he was about it. I consider it was a great injustice, and that I have every right to execrate his memory."

Evelyn bit her lip again to prevent uttering the retort that rose to her tongue.

"He had a right to do what he thought fit with his own," she said, after a pause, "and he did it of his free will. I had no idea, till the will was read, that I should inherit more than a mere maintenance. But to return to the old subject. If you wished to preserve your incognito, what on earth made you venture so near to Mount Eden? Surely you had heard of Uncle Roger's death, and that I reigned here in his stead?"

"You know the reason," he replied moodily. "I met the Featherstones in Rome, and became engaged to Agnes. For some time no allusion was made to you or Mount Eden. When it was, it was too late for me to draw back on that account, or to refuse to accompany them to the Hall. So I trusted to your not recognizing me, or at all events till my position should be assured amongst them, as it soon will be now."

"What do you mean by your position being assured amongst them?" demanded Evelyn coldly.

"I mean until after my marriage, which will take place in a few weeks. Agnes and I are much attached to one another, and love will not brook much delay, so we expect to be able to coax the old people to let the wedding take place in July. And after that, you see, all danger will be over for me, for Mr. Featherstone would do anything sooner than let a shadow of blame rest on his daughter's husband."

He spoke lightly of his approaching happiness, as if no word or thought of love had ever passed between him and the woman he was addressing. But Evelyn's mind was

fixed on the scared criminal she had helped at the risk of her own safety to escape the hands of justice, and his effrontery (or his forgetfulness) fanned the desire for revenge that had arisen in her breast.

"And do you suppose," she exclaimed, advancing upon him with eyes of fire, "do you imagine for a moment that I intend to stand by quietly and see you marry Agnes Featherstone without making one sign—*she*, who is my dearest friend—the creature I love best in all the world—and *you*—a forger?"

"Hush! hush!" he cried in alarm, "it is not true. It was all a mistake. I told you so. I never did it. It was a malicious lie. There are no proofs."

"There *are* proofs, Will Caryll, and *I* hold them. The cheques to which you forged Uncle Roger's name were returned to him after your departure, and he retained them. The firm wished to prosecute you, but in deference to his name (and perhaps to his wishes, I cannot tell) they gave up their intention. But he kept the proofs of your felony, and, after his death, they fell into my hands, and I have them still. I have but to send them to Messrs. Tyndal & Masters, with the information of your return, to have you arrested for forgery. And before you shall marry Agnes Featherstone, *I will do so.*"

William Caryll turned white with fear.

"But you will not," he pleaded; "you could never be so cruel, Eve."

"How could I justify myself in acting otherwise?" she retorted. "Will, you don't know what Agnes is to me. For years past (ever since you left me) she has been my greatest comfort and my greatest pleasure. I have loved her above every earthly thing. I do so still. She has been like an idolized child or younger sister to me. I have thought of her, and worked for her. I have even dreamt sometimes (since there seems no chance now of our Cousin Hugh ever turning up again) of making her the inheritress of this property, when I have to leave it behind me. And do you think I will see her thrown away upon *you;* leave Mount Eden to her children and *yours?* Never. I will burn it to the ground with my own hands first."

She was grand in her outraged love and her care for her young friend, and the man cowered before her. He saw that his fate lay in her hands, and he could not think at

first what arguments to use in order to avert it. Then suddenly he thought of her former love for him—of her present love for Agnes. Surely these were weapons that should not miss their mark, and he was cowardly enough to use them.

"You have forgotten, then," he said slowly, "the protestations of affection you made for me in the days gone by, Eve; the vows you registered to stand my friend forever? If I remember rightly, you sealed that promise by an appeal to God over your dead mother's grave. You seem to think very lightly of such things. And we even agreed, I think, that whichever of us came into Mount Eden was to share it with the other. You have got it all, Eve, and yet you are not satisfied—yet you would grudge me my little prospect of comfort. You are sadly altered from what you were in the olden days."

"Don't speak of them," she answered, in a muffled voice.

"But I *must* speak of them," he said, thinking he had gained an advantage over her. "You have blamed me for not having written to you. It was not from want of affection, Eve. I know that, in the hurry of departure, I promised to do so, but when I came to reflect, I recognized the danger I should run, and saw that the indulgence of my inclinations might cast me back upon your hands—a criminal—and then you would suffer as well as myself. And so I determined to bear my burden alone, and leave you to a happier existence. And my plan has succeeded, Eve. You are wealthy and prosperous, and can afford to be generous. Leave me that which can neither harm nor benefit you—my benefactor's name, and the hand of Agnes Featherstone."

"*Never!*" she repeated vehemently; "I grudge you nothing except *that*, Will. If you are independent, and (comparatively speaking) able to hold up your head amongst your fellow-men, I am glad of it, for your sake. But I will be no party to deception. I will not be called upon to extend the hand of fellowship to Jasper Lyle, when I know him to be William Caryll. You must give up Agnes. It is my sole condition of silence."

"I *cannot* give her up," he replied despondently; what excuse can I offer for breaking off my engagement? The girl loves me, and her family approve of the marriage. To draw back now would be an act of dishonor."

"It would be far more dishonorable to marry her without telling her the truth. And if you tell her the truth she will be the first to dismiss you. Take your choice, Will, but *my* mind is made up."

"You will betray my secret?"

"I will not let Agnes Featherstone marry my cousin, believing him to be an honorable and upright man. I have already told you so. I should be as bad as you are if I agreed to it."

"Then all my hopes of happiness are over," said Will Caryll bitterly; "and it is *your* hand that has crushed them, Eve. Oh, how altered you have become since the old days, when we were friends together! Is it possible you are the same girl whose chief aim in life was to secure my happiness? Do you remember the scoldings you used to get from your aunt for working and watching for me; and how you used to brave her anger to make me comfortable? Have you forgotten the Sunday evenings we spent walking about the cemetery and talking of the time when we should live together? And those last miserable days, Eve, when you were so good and kind to me, and dressed me in your own clothes, and we were too frightened and unhappy even to laugh at the figure of fun I cut in them? Have you forgotten all this?"

Ah! she had not forgotten it—far from it. She had been keeping up bravely until then,—indignation and resentment having given her courage,—but when Will spoke of the old days, and she remembered how she had valued his affection, and how much she had counted on its endurance, her fortitude broke down, and she burst suddenly into tears.

The sound was as grateful to Will Caryll's ears as that of rain after drought. He saw she had not ceased to love him, and that her opposition had arisen from wounded feeling. What if he wielded the weapon so unexpectedly put into his hands? If all hope of winning Agnes Featherstone was to be wrested from him, why should he not take advantage of his cousin's evident fidelity, and claim the old promise of her hand in marriage? Thoughts of the Mount Eden property flashed through his mind at the same moment, and made the transfer of his affections seem to be the most natural thing in the world, and as soon as Evelyn began to cry, he rushed to her and seized her hand.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, with all his old fervor, "you remember as well as myself? You can still weep (as I do) for the happy days in which we were all in all to one another. Ah, Eve, is it possible your love has lived like this—through silence, and separation, and despair? My dear, *dear* Eve! How often have I pictured our re-union; and blamed my folly for thinking it possible you could be faithful to me for so long. But it is actually true. You love me still. Do you think that if I had believed so, I should ever have engaged myself to Agnes Featherstone—that any woman could have taken the place of my first young love? Oh, no, no! I thought you must be married long ago, and I flew to the first arms that opened to comfort me. But now that I know the happy truth—that I can assure you that *my* heart beats in unison with yours, and you have never been forgotten by me—let us renew those youthful vows, Eve, and pledge ourselves to a life-long constancy."

He had poured this speech out so rapidly, kneeling by the side of the chair on which she had thrown herself, that Eve listened for awhile in silent astonishment, too thunderstruck to stem the torrent of his words. But as he concluded, and looked up into her face for sympathy, she rose from her seat, and gazed at him with unspeakable contempt.

"You ask me *that*," she cried; "not only to become a participator in your deceit, but to break my darling's heart into the bargain—to be untrue to her whom (I have told you) I love better than myself? Why you must be *mad*, or think me so. Take you back—*you*, who have been false to me—who would be false now to Agnes Featherstone, and separate myself from her and from my own esteem for ever? My God! what can men think that women are made of? But you waste your time, Will Caryll. You are no longer mine, and you shall never be hers. Make what excuse you like for it, but break off your engagement with Agnes, and leave the Hall within a reasonable time, or I shall inform Mr. Featherstone of your true name and history."

"You never loved me. It has all been a mistake," he said sulkily. "No woman who had ever cared for a man could deliberately effect his ruin."

"I *did* love you," she answered mournfully, "and I am

not sure that I do not love you still, but no affection can live that is not founded on esteem. And if I do not effect *your* ruin (as you call it), I must prevent that of my dearest friend. And there is no choice, in my eyes, between the two. So now you know my final decision."

"I will defy you yet," he returned angrily. "I don't believe you have any proofs against me. You only said so to make me succumb to your wishes."

"I will show you whether I have spoken the truth or not," said Evelyn, as she unlocked a drawer of the marquetrie cabinet, and took out a packet of papers. "There are your forged cheques," she continued, holding them towards him—"one for ten pounds, one for fifteen, and one for twenty-five; and all of them endorsed in Uncle Roger's handwriting, with the word 'forgery.' Now, do you believe me?"

He made a snatch at the papers, but she was too quick for him.

"I thought you would try that game," she said quietly, as she re-locked them into the drawer, "and I was prepared for it, you see. But it would have done you no good, Will. I shall never use those proofs against you; but you shall not marry Agnes Featherstone."

"Curse you," he muttered between his teeth, "it will be war to the knife between us now. But I will deny my own identity. I will swear that you are utterly mistaken—that you are a mad woman, and it will rest with you to prove your sanity. Not a soul in England could recognize me but yourself."

"I have your photographs and your handwriting, and I know that your hair is dyed. I don't think there would be much trouble in proving you to be William Caryll," said Evelyn, as she moved away again to the window.

He saw that the game was played out between them now. He had entreated, and denied, and dared her, and it had ended in a signal defeat. There was nothing left but to accept what terms she might choose to dictate to him.

"Very well," he said, with assumed humility, "I am in your hands, Eve, and if you are determined to rob my miserable life of its last chance of happiness, you must do so. But give me a few days' respite. I can't go and blurt out the wretched truth without any preparation. Will you give me a week to think what will be best to do for Agnes and myself?"

"Yes," she answered slowly, "I will give you a week, and at the end of that time you must speak, or I shall."

He bowed his head and approached the door, and she rung the bell for him to be shown out of her house.

And so these two met and parted, who had once thought to pass their lives together.

CHAPTER XVII.

COUNSELLOR PHILIP.

EVEN when Will Caryll was fairly gone, Evelyn Rayne managed to preserve her equanimity. Naturally she was a soft-hearted and yielding woman in matters of the affections, but in this instance she seemed turned to stone. Directly her spirit showed the least sign of relenting—when she recalled the terrible blight of sin that had fallen on her cousin's boyhood, and the abject look of misery and humiliation with which he had left her presence—then the remembrance of her love for him, and of the mutual vows which they had exchanged, rose up to crush her feelings of compassion, and make her judge him only as an impostor, who aspired to become the husband of Agnes Featherstone.

Her dear, sweet Agnes!—her innocent, unsuspecting child, with the pouting lips and the golden hair! Could she stand quietly by and see her married to a criminal whom she believed to be an honorable man? It was impossible! Duty, as well as affection, urged her on to the task she had set herself, and she was determined to perform it to the bitter end. How far jealousy and disappointment biased her decision, Evelyn did not stop to inquire of herself. She was but a woman after all—a very admirable and lovable woman with more than the average powers of her sex, but still with many of its weaknesses.

Had Will Caryll returned to England faithful to herself, and eager to consummate their love by marriage (even though under an assumed personality), his former delinquencies would have proved no obstacle in her eyes. He would have appeared a martyr, intead of a felon. She would have shielded and guarded him as she had done in

the days gone by, and made terms for him with his former employers, if she had lost every farthing she possessed to accomplish her object. She would have burned the proofs she held of his forgery on a bonfire of congratulation and rejoicing, and stood by his side with her strong hand clasped in his, and defied the world to blame her or to accuse him.

Will Caryll little knew what he had lost in losing Evelyn Rayne. But, under present circumstances, it would have been impossible to make her believe that she would have acted otherwise. All her faith in her own species was shaken to the centre. She hardly thought of Will Caryll as untrue to herself. She remembered only that he was false to Agnes and the world, and, as Agnes' friend, it was her bounden duty to expose him. She did not indulge in any more sentiment. Will Caryll's appeal to their former affection for each other (which proved how little he really cared for his *fiancé*) had dried her tears at their source, and left her hardened, miserable, and reckless.

She even seemed more cheerful during the remainder of the day than usual. She was not still one moment. She ran when she need only have walked, and she laughed when a smile would have answered the purpose equally well.

She rode out with Captain Philip in the afternoon, and stood, until the hour for labor was over, watching the excavation of a decoy. The captain hardly recognized her under this new aspect. He had always considered her to be too grave for so young a woman. But she might have been seventeen again that day, instead of twenty-seven, by the rapidity with which she chattered, and the irrelevance of her remarks. He found his own thoughts wandering from the business they had in hand, whilst he tried to puzzle out the meaning of this sudden transformation. Evelyn, with an intuition that was natural to her, and especially where Captain Philip was concerned, guessed what he was thinking of, and the discovery seemed to make her spirits flag. Without warning she drooped, and became silent; and, after a few vain efforts to resume her former cheerfulness, confessed herself to be tired, and turned her horse's head in the direction of home. But neither one phase of feeling nor the other deceived her companion.

"Now, what is wrong with her?" he thought, as, with

knitted brows and rapid step, he took his own way back to Bachelor's Hall. "This is not her ordinary equable behavior. Something must have occurred to worry her. Can it be the projected wedding of Agnes Featherstone? I heard that foreign-looking fellow had called on her this afternoon. Perhaps she fears he will not make her little friend happy. And yet—and yet—much as I believe in her powers of affection, Evelyn's evident disturbance went even beyond the interests of friendship. How I wish she would confide in me. How I wish I could console her."

Captain Philip had no one but his pipe to trust his secrets to by that time, for John Vernon had been obliged to rejoin his ship, and once more he reigned alone in Bachelor's Hall. So much the better, he said to himself, for his life was a sealed book, into which he desired no one to pry. As he settled himself in his arm-chair that evening, with his books on the table beside him, and his beloved pipe in his mouth, he unlocked his desk, and drew thence two or three photographs of Miss Rayne, with which, from time to time, she had presented him. No one who had seen Captain Philip at that moment would have believed he was the same practical, hardworking, and apparently stolid agent of Mount Eden, who had made himself known, for miles round, as the possessor of one of the longest heads and the coolest brains in the country. His muscular frame positively trembled as he took the pieces of cardboard in his hands, and his grey eyes were dimmed with moisture.

"Evelyn," he whispered softly, two or three times in repetition, as though he loved to hear his own voice speak her name; "Evelyn, if you only knew how I long to fill up the void I can discern in your life. But I have put it out of my reach for ever. To tell her now what I should have told her long ago, would seem like taking an unfair advantage of my power. No! I must win you first, my darling," he continued, pressing the picture to his bearded mouth, "if I can do so—and then—and then—if that happy day should ever come— But, bah! what a fool I am!" he exclaimed finally, as he locked her photographs away again. "What should ever make her think of me in any other light but that in which I have placed myself—as her land-agent and overseer? She has never given me a word or look to say that she regards me otherwise. No;

God bless her! whatever may happen she will never be to blame. Only—how much I should like to know what disturbed her this afternoon, and whether it was connected with the visit of Mr. Jasper Lyle. But, after all, it is no business of mine, and I am only indulging in idle curiosity by thinking of it; and, in any other man, I should call it d—d impertinence."

But though he took up a book of new travels, and tried hard to fix his mind upon it, Captain Philip found it waste time to read that evening, and, opening the door of his little cottage, he strode out into the balmy night air, with his pipe between his teeth, and his head bare, and wandered away as far as the plantation of larch and fir-trees, which he was traversing with young Vernon when they first met Evelyn Rayne. The night was still as death—so still that even the nightingales, that began to sing a few flute-like notes every now and then, stopped short as though alarmed at the sound of their own voices, and the faint crying of the speckled frogs, and the whizz and whirr of the night moths, could be heard distinctly. Captain Philip paced on thoughtfully—the soft moss and summer herbage yielding like a carpet beneath his feet, and giving no notice of his advance. But his quick ear, ever on the alert for poachers and trespassers on Mount Eden, presently detected the sound of a footstep down the lower drive, and quick as lightning, he flew after and overtook it.

"Oh! Captain Philip!" cried the voice of Evelyn Rayne. "How you startled me!"

"*Miss Rayne!*" he exclaimed in astonishment. "*You* here, and alone!"

"And why not, Captain Philip?" she replied, in a would-be lively tone; but he detected the sound of tears in her voice, nevertheless. "Surely I can take a stroll in my own grounds without attendance? Suppose I were to accuse you of the same impropriety—what then? You seem to enjoy the night air as much as I do, and you have not even a hat on, so you are worse than I am."

But for all her assumed levity, he could hear she had been weeping, and her frame trembled as she leant against a tree.

"You must know what I mean" he answered gravely;

"the dew is falling heavily—your dress is quite damp, and although these are your own grounds, they are too extensive to be traversed by a young lady, unprotected, at ten o'clock at night. Do you know, when I first detected your footstep, I thought it might be that of a poacher?"

"It is lucky you were not carrying a gun, Captain Philip. You might have shot me down."

"I hope I am not quite so rash as that, Miss Rayne; but I wish that, for your part, you would be more prudent. Do let me persuade you to return to the house."

"I shall get no harm," she said fretfully, for he was touching her wound, though unaware to himself.

"But you will get no good, Miss Rayne. Forgive me for saying that I think I understand something of the feeling that led you abroad to-night (although I have no notion whence it arises). I have felt it myself—that restlessness of spirit—and can sympathize with it. But you are too delicate to attempt to walk it off."

"I am *not* delicate," she returned defiantly. "I am as hard as nails. Nothing will ever kill me but old age. I suppose it is due to my bringing up. It has been all hard throughout. I have had no friends, no advisers, no guides. I have been thrown on myself for sympathy and counsel, and—"

And here, as though to prove her hardness, Miss Rayne broke down, and began to cry.

Captain Philip took her hand (but most respectfully), and placed it on his arm.

"Come home," he said soothingly; "you have been overwrought to-day. Let me take you back to the big house."

His allusion seemed to bring back some remembrance that braced her up. She let her hand rest where he had placed it, and began to step out firmly towards home. Her tears dried up again, and her proud spirit began to question how she could have been so weak as to betray herself.

"How very foolish you must think me," she said, when she could command her voice. "It is not often I am so weak, is it? But I am over tired to-day, and a little worried, and—and—*I am a woman*, which accounts for everything."

"I could see you were not yourself this afternoon. You should have gone straight to bed, and sought relief in rest,"

said Captain Philip gently. "You know you need never attend to business unless you feel inclined. *I* am always ready and willing to take the whole responsibility of it on my own shoulders."

"I believe you would work yourself to death if I would allow you," replied Evelyn, and then she asked suddenly,—

"Captain Philip, have you a mother or sisters?"

The captain seemed quite taken aback. The mistress of Mount Eden had never asked him a single question concerning his family affairs before.

"No, Miss Rayne," he stammered, "I am not so fortunate. My poor mother died when I was quite an infant, and I never had any sisters."

"Neither had I. It is sad to feel so much alone, isn't it?"

"It *is* sad. But what made you ask me that question?"

"I will answer you frankly. You are so good and kind, Captain Philip, I thought that if you had sisters like yourself, I should like to know them—to make them my friends. I have so few female friends," said Evelyn, with a sigh; "I seem to have no one to go to for advice in a dilemma."

"Pardon me for saying so, but do you consider women are the best friends for women—as a rule?"

"Unless one is married, yes. But I shall never be married," replied Evelyn.

"It is early days to determine *that*, Miss Rayne. We shall see you following Miss Featherstone's example yet."

She started violently.

"Ah! don't mention it, please. I cannot tell you how hateful the notion is to me."

And then she seemed to take a sudden resolve, such a resolve as comes to one sometimes in solitude and darkness, and looks quite different then from what it would do in the glare of day. She resolved to make Captain Philip her friend, and ask his advice, without confessing she was doing so—Captain Philip, to whom she had never shown anything but bare politeness yet. But then she had needed nothing more herself.

"Captain Philip," she commenced, without further preamble, "how far do you consider the privileges of friendship should go?"

"I should consider the privileges of a true friendship illimitable, Miss Rayne."

"Even to the wrecking of your friend's happiness?"

"If it were for your friend's good, yes. But which of us can determine what *is* for good or for evil in this world? The very thing which looks the worst thing possible in our eyes may be the pre-destined means to a right end. That is where the difficulty comes in. Too many of us are apt to arrogate to ourselves the privileges of the Creator under the name of duty, which only stands for self-gratification."

"On those grounds one should never interfere in anything, Captain Philip. One should stand by and see a fellow-creature down without holding out a hand?"

"Oh, no. The opportunity to save is there, therefore it should be taken advantage of."

"Then if one of my acquaintances had engaged a servant whom I knew to be a thief, should I not be justified in telling the truth about him?"

"Certainly, if he had not left off being a thief."

The spontaneous twitch upon his arm made Captain Philip aware that something in his reply had touched her.

"*If he had not left off being a thief*," she repeated slowly. "But surely he might relapse?"

"He *might*. But isn't it a part of our duty to hope the best for our fellow-creatures, Miss Rayne, and does any one stand firmly without having had a few falls? A confirmed thief is a different thing. But I should be sorry to place an obstacle in the way of the reformation of any man who had sinned once—or even twice. We cannot measure the temptation any more than the repentance. The Almighty, who weighs both, will not condemn us for erring on the side of mercy."

"Thank you," replied Evelyn, after a pause. "You are a good man, Captain Philip, and you have given me something to think of. The—the servant I spoke of tells me he has repented, and perhaps I am bound to believe him."

"If you refuse to believe him on your own authority, and he never regains the position he has lost, his downfall will certainly be laid (in a measure) at your door."

"But if he robs my friend?" suggested Evelyn, in a trembling voice.

"Cannot you caution your friend without betraying the dependence placed on yourself? Cannot you open her eyes (of course it is a lady—a man would never do such a

stupid thing as to engage a servant without good references) to the advisability of inquiring into his past life and character, and leave her to judge for herself? If, after that, she wilfully shuts her eyes to his possible shortcomings, I should consider your responsibility in the matter had ceased. Has the lady applied to you for the man's character?"

"Oh, no. I have nothing to do with it. She does not know I ever knew him."

"Then take my advice and leave them alone, Miss Rayne. No good ever came in this world of interfering, and it generally ends by both parties turning round against you. Your friend won't be in the least bit obliged,—you may depend on that,—and the man will probably take to poaching your preserves. Time enough to speak when you're asked to do so."

"I believe you're right," said Evelyn, as they reached a side door of the big house, "and I have been worrying myself too much about a trifle."

"You have too sensitive a conscience," he replied, as she shook hands with him.

"Nothing of the sort, Captain Philip; but I have been worried."

"I *know* you have been worried," he replied sympathetically, as he left her. "But all the same," he said to himself, as he walked back to Bachelor's Hall, you have not deceived me, Evelyn Rayne. No man-servant's peccadilloes have had the power to shake your proud spirit in this way. It had something to do with Miss Featherstone's marriage. I am sure of that; else, why should her question have so immediately followed her expression of distaste at my mention of it? Can she have met this Jasper Lyle before, and under different circumstances? It is hardly probable. He is not the sort of man, with his half-foreign ways, to be easily forgotten; and he is evidently a stranger to everybody about here. And whilst at Liverpool, living in obscurity with her aunt, she was not in a position to make acquaintances. But there's a mystery somewhere, though I haven't got to the bottom of it yet. But if it is to worry her, or make her unhappy, I will—*I will.*

Meanwhile, Evelyn was repeating to herself the words which he had said to her. "*If he had not left off being a thief!*" Had Will left off being a thief? The question

rung in her ears all night, and throughout the following day. She had no reason to doubt it. He could hardly have attained the position he held unless he had lived in a respectable and honorable manner. And for that one terrible blot upon his boyhood—for that one fierce temptation weakly yielded to, was she to condemn him to a life-long punishment, to thrust the happiness he was about to grasp from his hand, and turn him out upon the world again with the criminal's brand upon his brow? She dared not to it. She shuddered at the idea of what might befall him—abandoned and outcast for the second time; and yet, to think of Agnes, her trusting, unsuspecting Agnes, linked to a forger. Oh, it was terrible. She did not know what to do, nor how to decide. Yet, through all her uncertainty, rang the echo of Captain Philip's words: "If he never regains the position he has lost, his downfall will certainly lie in a measure at your door."

Her first jealous anger was over by this time. Evelyn's strong heart could not love where it despised; and Will's conduct had been thoroughly despicable. But she was still sadly confused and uncertain how she ought to act, when the smart Featherstone liveries came gleaming up the avenue, and Mrs. Featherstone, all furbelows, flounces, and flurry, rushed into her presence. Her agitated appearance made Evelyn's heart quake with fear for what she might have to say.

"Oh, my dear girl," she commenced excitedly, "I have come to take you back to the Hall with me. Now, no excuses, Evelyn. I know how busy you are, and what a lot you have to do; but Agnes is ill, and I am sure you will not refuse to go to her, for she is crying out for you every moment."

"Agnes ill! Oh, what is the matter?" exclaimed Evelyn, forgetting all about her interview with Will Caryll in her anxiety for her favorite friend.

"Don't ask *me*, my dear, for I'm sure *I* can't tell you, no more than nothing," replied Mrs. Featherstone; "only the whole house is topsy-turvy, and heaven only knows what will happen to us next, and Agnes has locked herself into her bedroom, and won't come out for her Aunt Sophy nor me, nor anybody."

"But why—why?" cried Elvelyn, in palpable distress.

"Why, all on account of Mr. Jasper Lyle, of course. Haven't I told you? Dear, dear! my poor brain is whirling so, I hardly know if I'm on my head or my heels. Well, my dear Evelyn, you know how we all liked him (and *do*, for the matter of that), and how the wedding day was almost fixed, as you may say, and now he's going away."

Evelyn became silent.

"Do you hear me, my dear? Actually going back to Italy without any warning or reasonable excuse, and without fixing any time for his return. Of course Mr. Featherstone he's quite put out about it, and says the engagement had better be broken off altogether, and poor Agnes is in hysterics, and I feel so ill you might knock me down with a feather."

"But, dear Mrs. Featherstone, I don't quite understand. Surely Mr.—Mr.—Lyle must have given some reason for his abrupt departure? It must be family matters, or money matters, or something of importance that takes him from England at such a moment. He must have told Mr. Featherstone something about it. It would be so extraordinary —so uncalled for else."

"My dear, he told papa *nothing*, except that it was imperative he should leave us, and when he was asked *why* and for how long, he stuttered and stammered, and said he would write and tell us everything on getting back to Italy. And I believe he has told our poor Agnes that his health won't permit him to live in England, or some such rubbish, and she is breaking her heart over it. Such a shock for the poor child, you know, when she was just thinking about ordering her trousseau."

"It would be a terrible shock, but we must hope to avert it," replied Evelyn, as she hurried away to put on her walking costume; and all the time she was doing it her heart kept on asking, "What shall I do? What shall I do?"

"Dear Mrs. Featherstone," she said when they found themselves driving to the Hall together, "do tell me the truth. Does Mr. Featherstone know anything of Mr. Lyle's antecedents? Did he ascertain how he had been living during his residence in Italy? Agnes is such a prize, you know, in every respect, that one cannot be too careful that her prospective husband should have none but the most honorable motives in seeking her hand in marriage."

"Oh, you're quite right, my dear, and very sensible, and see things just as you should do. We always say at the Hall, 'If you want real sound advice, go to Evelyn Rayne for it.' But we weren't *quite* so careless as you seem to think. We met Mr. Jasper Lyle first at the house of our mutual friends, the Spencers, and you know how *very* particular Mrs. Spencer (being second cousin, once removed, to Lord Courtley) is concerning whom she admits to her evening parties. And when we saw how taken Mr. Lyle became with our Agnes, papa made all sorts of inquiries about him of Mr. Spencer, and he told us that *his* friends, Sir Andrew and Lady Marsden, had known Mr. Lyle *for years*, and that he was a most estimable young man, who, though poor, had lived a thoroughly respectable and quiet life, never gambling, or drinking or running into debt, but behaving like a gentleman in every respect. And papa thinks nothing of his want of money, you know, Evelyn, since we have plenty for them both, and only want our Agnes to be happy in her own way. And then—when we thought everything was going so smooth—to have this terrible upset. It's most trying, my dear, I can assure you."

"There is no need of assurance, dear Mrs. Featherstone, I can understand your feelings thoroughly," said Evelyn. "But may there not be some mistake in the matter? Mr. Lyle is so much of a foreigner, he may not have been able to explain himself properly to Mr. Featherstone. It may be his health, or his private affairs, that compel him to return to Italy for a while, and he may have every intention of a speedy return. Don't you think you are all looking at the matter in rather too serious a light?"

"There now!" exclaimed Mrs. Featherstone, with the intensest admiration, "I *said* to papa that it was ten to one but what you'd put everything right for us. You're a wonderful young woman, Evelyn Rayne. Talk of grey heads on green shoulders! Why, you might be sixty to hear you talk. I shouldn't wonder (as you say) if we've all made a mess of it. Papa's no hand at French, no more than myself; and Agnes has been in such a state ever since she heard that Mr. Lyle is going away, that I don't believe she's been able to understand anything. But you must get at the truth of it for us, Evelyn, and then, if the young man only wants to run home for a while to settle his affairs,

why, we must put the wedding off for a month, and nobody will be the worse for that."

"No, indeed," replied Evelyn, with affected cheerfulness, as the carriage stopped at Featherstone Hall, and she ran upstairs to Agnes' bedroom.

If (she kept on repeating to herself), *if* Agnes' affections were really so deeply involved, and Will *had* tried to live down the evil past by a virtuous and honorable manhood —why, she would bid him stay on and fear nothing more from her. Captain Philip had said that we should never be condemned for erring on the side of mercy.

When she reached Agnes' room, she found the silly little girl as despairing as though her lover had been stretched out in his coffin, and ready for the grave. She sobbed in Evelyn's arms for some time so bitterly as to be quite unable to speak, and when the passionate outburst had somewhat subsided, her words were scarcely coherent.

"But what is all this terrible fuss about, my Agnes?" inquired Evelyn, in her soft, rich voice. "Has Mr. Lyle deserted you for some other woman, or is he so ill that the doctors have given up all hope of his recovery?"

"No, no," sobbed Agnes, from the shelter of her friend's bosom; "but he is going back to Italy at once, and I feel certain I shall never see him again."

"But surely that is rating your lover's fidelity at a very low standard, Agnes. Has Mr. Lyle intimated in any way that he has no intention of returning?"

"Oh, no. He has said nothing about that. Only it is imperative that he should go away for a while. Nothing that we can say or do will alter his determination. And, Evelyn, I have a premonition that it is *for ever*. Something will happen to prevent our meeting again. It was too good to last. No one is permitted long to be so happy in this world as I have been."

She had been *so happy*, poor child, and it was the hand of her dearest friend that had pulled that happiness down.

"My dear, sweet Agnes," cried Evelyn, "do you love Mr. Lyle so much as all that? Would parting from him now destroy all your happiness in this world?"

"Oh, Evelyn, how can you ask me such a question? My happiness is bound up in him. If we are to part for ever I shall die. If he were to prove faithless to me, I should take my own life."

"It is wrong to speak like that, Agnes. No man is worthy of so much confidence. They are all faulty, remember, and apt to succumb to temptation. Don't think too much of Mr. Lyle, or any man, or you may live to be bitterly disappointed."

"And yet you think of and trust your Cousin Will!" returned Agnes innocently. "You told me, Evelyn, that you were *sure* he would never be untrue to you, and you were waiting in perfect faith and confidence for him to come back again and claim you. Didn't you, now? And mayn't I think as much of Jasper as you do of Will?"

Evelyn's sweet blue eyes were suddenly dimmed with tears. Yes, it was true. How much she had thought of Will! And now— But pride drove her tears back to their source, and Agnes never saw them fall.

"Yes, dear," said her friend gently, "you can think just as much of Jasper as I do of Will. I will not dispute that. Only, if this separation is to give you so much pain, and fill you with such mournful forebodings, can it not be avoided?"

"Jasper says *not*, Evelyn. He told papa that the most important business called him abroad, and that it was impossible to say how long it might keep him there. That is the miserable part of it."

"Suppose *I* were to speak to Mr. Lyle, Agnes? I have a good business head, and may be able to advise him. He is so ignorant of English laws and customs, he may not be aware that his business (whatever it may be) can be executed quite as well by writing as by word of mouth."

Agnes brightened up immediately.

"Oh yes, Evelyn, *do*. You always set everything right. The first thing I did when I heard this horrible news was to ask them to send for you. And you can tell Jasper what *I* can't," she added blushing, "that if he *must* go to Italy, it would be much better for him to wait, and take me with him; and then we should have a happy trip together, instead of a miserable separation."

"And you are *quite* sure, then, my darling, that your heart will never change?" said Evelyn anxiously, "and that, if after your marriage you found out that Mr. Lyle was not all you had believed him to be—if you heard he had been wild and reckless, and even wicked, in his youth —still you think that you could continue to love him, and

pity him, and console him for all he may have gone through, and never remember that he was less a hero than you believe him to be now?"

She was so thoroughly in earnest, she made the shallower nature earnest too.

"Indeed—*indeed* I would, Evelyn," replied Agnes, her big eyes full of solemn truth. "I love him so dearly, that if I heard he had been a *murderer*, it could only make me love him more. Nothing could hurt me now, except to part from him."

"Then you *shan't* part from him, my darling," said Evelyn determinedly; but then, seeing the look of surprise which Agnes fixed upon her, she mitigated the force of her words. "I mean that I will speak to Mr. Lyle myself, and point out to him that he has incurred a duty, by engaging himself to you, which forbids his leaving England, if it is to be the cause of so much unhappiness. His Italian business can doubtless be arranged quite as well after marriage as before. And now, darling, you will not cry any more, will you? I don't know my pretty Agnes with these red eyes and swollen features. Get up and bathe your face, and change your dress, and let Mr. Lyle see you fresh and smiling when you meet again. Where shall I find him, Agnes? I want to put you out of your suspense at once."

"I don't know, dear Evelyn. He has seemed very miserable all yesterday and to-day, and I think, after his talk with papa, he went out into the garden."

"Then I will go and look for him there," said Evelyn, as she left the room.

But her heart beat very fast as she did so.

"Never mind, never mind," she said to herself, as she trampled down her feelings, "it must be done. It *ought* to be done (I am sure Captain Philip would say so), and the sooner it is over the better. Matters have gone too far with my poor little Agnes. I hardly thought she cared so much, and at all costs she *shall* be happy. And *he* too—this may be the turning point of his existence. Have I the right (as Captain Philip said) to arrogate to myself the privilege of the Almighty, and decide when, and to what limit, a pardon should be extended to the guilty? He has suffered enough, perhaps, and if he has been untrue to me, how could I hope (after all) to cope against the fascinations

of my little Agnes? But if—*if* it had only been some one else than her!"

She went all round the garden, with her brave firm hand pressed tightly against her aching heart, before she found him, and then the faint perfume of his cigar alone directed her to the sequestered seat where he had thrown himself, full length, in the plenitude of his disappointment.

As her apparition burst upon his view, Will Caryll sprung from his seat with an expression almost of fear,

"Eve!" he exclaimed, "I have kept my promise; indeed I have. I am going to leave England again, and *for ever*."

"Hush, Will," she answered warningly, "we must learn to address each other more formally, for some one might overhear us."

"What does it signify?" he said, in a tone of despair, as he sunk back upon the garden seat. "I have told you I am going. If they knew everything now, it would not make much difference."

"Yes, it would," said Evelyn, biting her lip, as his attitude recalled the weak-minded youth of old to her, "for I have come to tell you that you must remain and marry Agnes Featherstone. It is too late to draw back now. I see that plainly, and that her health and happiness will suffer if her engagement to you is broken off."

"But if you are determined to betray me—" he began sheepishly.

"Did I ever betray you yet, Will?" she answered, with calm reproach. "Can you recall one instance in which I played you false, or did not do my uttermost to further your purpose?"

"But you said you would yesterday, Eve. You swore that if *I* did not speak, you would. And so I thought that the easiest plan for me would be to clear out altogether."

She stood before him, with her hand still pressed against her throbbing heart, and her sad eyes turned resolutely away.

"You must make some allowances for yesterday," she answered slowly; "you took me by surprise, and I spoke hastily. Agnes is very, *very* dear to me, and I rank her happiness above my own. When I thought that you would wreck it, I told you to go. Now that I see that it is bound up in yours, I tell you to stay, and, from this moment, you shall be Jasper Lyle to me, and I will do my utmost to forget that you were ever—Will Caryll."

He leapt up then, and tried to seize her hand, but she prevented him sternly.

"Remember *who you are*," she said,—"the affianced husband of my friend. Have I not just warned you that we must not only forget, but utterly erase the past? Therein lies your only safety, for I have spoken of my cousin Will Caryll to Agnes, and a very little want of care might raise her suspicions of you. Your future is in your own hands now. Make it as noble and free from blame as the past should have been."

"But what excuse can I offer Mr. Featherstone for changing my intentions?" asked Will Caryll, involuntarily leaning on her, as of old.

"Surely Agnes' misery at the idea of parting with you would be sufficient excuse for anything. Say you have given up the idea of leaving England on her account. It will be perfectly true. And go now, Will, as quickly as you can, and tell the poor girl of your decision, or she will make herself ill with weeping."

"Eve!" he exclaimed, "how can I thank you for your generosity—your forbearance? I have always loved you—no time, nor distance, nor silence could tear my heart or memory from those unforgotten days, when—"

"Oh, hush, hush!" she said, in a voice of the keenest pain, "never speak of them again. They are dead and gone days. The cousin I knew then has vanished for ever. From this day, you must be to me Mr. Jasper Lyle only, and I to you your wife's nearest and most faithful friend. Go to her, Mr. Lyle, go at once, and—*depend securely upon me!*"

"You will come with me?" he said.

"No; she will not need me now. I will see her by-and-bye," replied Evelyn, as she waved him from her presence.

But when she had watched him enter the Hall, she turned her footsteps resolutely away, and walked across the fields to the big house again.

CHAPTER XVIII.

BY THE SAD SEA WAVES.

WITHIN twelve hours of this interview, peace and contentment once more reigned at Featherstone Hall. Mr. Lyle had informed his future father-in-law that (in consideration of Agnes' objection to his departure) he had given up the idea of re-visiting Italy (at all events for the present), and the old man had expressed himself as well pleased with his decision.

Mr. Featherstone had not been looking well lately—age, combined with the cares of business, and the constant journeys he was obliged to make backwards and forwards to his bank, was beginning to tell upon a naturally weak constitution, and he had grown greyer and more wrinkled than his years would justify. The little annoyance which had arisen consequent on Jasper Lyle's proposal had worried him far more than it was worth, and he hailed the announcement that his Agnes would have no more need to make herself unhappy.

"That is right, that is right," he said, when the news was conveyed to him; "what is the use of causing more anxiety and misery in this world than life naturally brings us? Let the wedding go on, my boy. The day that Agnes is married, I shall settle twenty thousand pounds on her, and I want to see her comfortably provided for, and happy with the man she loves, as soon as possible. Everything in this world is so uncertain. It is folly not to grasp at the goods the gods provide us before they pass beyond our reach."

"I trust Agnes will never pass beyond mine, Mr. Featherstone," said Jasper Lyle.

"No, no, I have no fear of it. She is good, and true as steel, and will make you a loving and faithful wife. But I should like the wedding to take place as soon as possible, and then you can take her to Italy if you see fit to do so."

The welcome intelligence soon spread through the household, delighting everybody (except the birds of prey, who had almost hoped that something was going to occur to prevent the invasion of a foreign element to the family), and Agnes came down to dinner wreathed in smiles and blushes, and only disposed to grumble at the fact that her darling Evelyn had not remained at the Hall to be a partaker of her renewed happiness.

"It is just like Evelyn," she pouted, "to come like a good fairy and set everything right, and then to walk off and take no part in it. You don't know her yet, Jasper," she continued to her *fiancé*. "When you do, you'll acknowledge there never was another such woman in the world as Evelyn Rayne."

"Always excepting Agnes Featherstone," he answered playfully.

But Agnes shook her head.

"No, no. I am not a bit like her. I could not be if I lived for a hundred years. Evelyn never cants or preaches, but she does just the right thing at the right time, and she never spares herself if it is for the good of others. Just see how interested she is about me and my marriage—and yet she has been so disappointed in her own—poor, darling Evelyn! Some women who have missed their happiness," said Agnes, with a glance in the direction of her Aunt Sophy, "become spiteful and ill-natured towards every one who is likely to attain it; but that is not Evelyn. She is only anxious that, if she can help it, no one shall suffer as she has done."

"Do you think, then, tnat she has suffered *very* much?" demanded Jasper Lyle, in a low tone.

"Very, *very* much. I am sure of it," answered Agnes, "for she told me so herself. She said that she worshipped her cousin,—that he was *her all*,—and the loss of him was the great trouble of her life. So you see how unselfish it is of her to work for the happiness of others. I wish she had been here to-night, to reap the reward of her labors. Mamma, will you write to tell Evelyn that all our plans are upset again, and the wedding-day is fixed for the tenth of next month? Of course she will be my bridesmaid—there is no need to ask her that. I should not feel married at all if Evelyn were not there."

"She appears to be more necessary to your happiness

than the bridegroom," observed Jasper, with a touch of jealousy.

"Of course she is, sir," replied Agnes, renewed confidence making her saucy. "Bridegrooms are as common as blackberries, but a friend like Evelyn is only met once in a lifetime."

She expected him to contradict her, if only for the fun of the thing; but he took her just in a very sober fashion.

"You are quite right, and I perfectly agree with you," he said thoughtfully, as he turned away.

By the next day, Evelyn heard that her efforts on Agnes' behalf had been successful, and that the wedding day was fixed for a much earlier date than had been previously intended; and then she did what to those who knew her seemed a very funny thing—she sent for her doctor. Now, during the ten years that she had lived at Mount Eden, Dr. Wilton had ever entered the house on her account, except once or twice. Healthy, vigorous, and with an eminently pure constitution, what should she need from medicine? She was always either on horseback or on foot, taking an abundance of exercise that would have made most women shudder. She rose early, and she went early to rest, living by choice on the plainest viands, and taking the least possible amount of spirituous liquor. Her clear eyes, cool hands, and elastic frame evidenced her enjoyment of perfect health, and if in the course of nature she sometimes felt a little languid or uneasy, she had her own simple remedies for such trifles, and would have laughed at the idea of consulting a medical man. She had, therefore, not seen Dr. Wilton for some time past, although he had been in constant attendance on her Uncle Roger for the two last years of his life, and she looked upon him as an intimate friend. He was very much concerned, therefore, when he received her note, asking him to call at Mount Eden, and posted off to answer it as quickly as his numerous engagements would permit. But as she came forward to greet him, with an outstretched hand, Dr. Wilton could not discern anything wrong in her appearance.

"Why, how is this?" he exclaimed cheerily. "*You're* not ill. I'd take my oath of that. Then who is it? Le brave Capitaine Philip?"

"Not that *I* know of," replied Evelyn smiling; "but I did not send for you to talk, but to listen. Now sit down

there, like a good man, and let me explain my little dilemma to you."

She had been battling hard with her memory, and her doubts, and her scruples during the last few days, but she was not going to let him see it. She forced herself to smile, and to speak lightly, and to carry things off with a high hand whilst he was there; and she managed to deceive him completely. Dr. Wilton was a clever practitioner, and could have detected a feverish eye or a failing pulse in a minute. But he had no power to discern the symptoms of an aching heart against the determination of the woman who bore it.

"I really *am* suffering from a disease, doctor," she went on merrily; "but it is such an uncommon one, that perhaps it has never come under your notice before."

"And what is it?" inquired the doctor.

"A plethora of friends."

"That is indeed a *very* uncommon complaint. What are the symptoms, Miss Rayne?"

"An inability to do things as I like; a superabundance of good-natured attempts to deprive me of my liberty of action, and to substitute what *they* think is best, for what *I* know I want. In short, doctor, I am anxious to get away from Mount Eden for a little change, and if you don't give me a certificate to say that I require it, I feel I shall never be able to go."

"Will they detain you by force? I thought you were lady paramount here."

"So I am; but I am alluding to my great and best friends, the Featherstones. They have only just returned from abroad themselves; but if they heard that I wished for change, they would either insist upon my going there, or upon accompanying me elsewhere. And I want to be alone," said Evelyn, her voice unconsciously falling to a lower key; "and so will you order me away to the seaside, that I may have a reasonable excuse to offer them for a hurried departure?"

"You want to go away—*alone*," repeated the doctor slowly, as he felt her pulse. "Why, what's the reason? Have you had any bad news lately? Failed in your speculations, or overdrawn your account at your bankers? Your pulse is rather irregular, and, now I come to look at you, your face is flushed. Why are you so anxious to run away from Mount Eden?"

Evelyn blushed beneath his scrutiny like a rose, but still maintained an affectation of indifference.

"I should have thought you would have expressed more curiosity to learn why I have not run away from it *before*, Dr. Wilton. Do you know that I have been living for ten years at Mount Eden, without once having a change? That, with my ample means and opportunities, I have never visited London or Paris, but lived on here from year's end to year's end like a vegetable?"

"True; it must be a very dull life for a young woman," observed the doctor thoughtfully.

But she would not admit that.

"Oh, no, no; it is *not!* It is everything that is most delightful to watch the change of the seasons—the sowing of the seed, the reaping of the harvest, the young animals growing up around me, the trees, the flowers, the birds, above all, to feel the power for good that has been bequeathed to me, and to care for my tenantry and laborers and their children; I think these are the greatest pleasures and the purest satisfaction that are attainable upon earth."

"Then why do you want to leave them?" said the doctor.

Her enthusiasm was quenched in a moment. A bitter remembrance rose to dim her eye, and make her tongue falter, and she paused to regain her courage.

"And you will have plenty of gaiety, by-and-by," continued Dr. Wilton, "if what I hear is true, and your friend Miss Featherstone is to be married next month. Do you know the gentleman? Does he meet with your approval? Is it what is termed a good match for her?"

"Oh, I think so," replied Evelyn hurriedly; "everybody approves of her choice, which is the main thing. But, doctor, about my going away. I only want you to *order* it, and I can manage the rest for myself."

"Of course I order it, and now I come to examine you more closely, Miss Rayne, there *is* a want of tone about you that will be all the better for a little sea air. Where will you go? Choose some bracing, lively place, like Brighton, or Ramsgate, for instance."

But she shrank from his suggestions as we shrink from the light that pains us.

"Oh, no; not Brighton, nor any place like that. I hate the glare, and the noise, and the publicity. I would rather go to the coast of Cornwall or Devonshire. I want to be quite alone."

"That is rather a strange idea of change from Mount Eden, Miss Rayne. I should have thought you had enough quiet and solitude at home; however, you must have your own way, I suppose, though I should have thought a bright, cheerful place was more suitable to so young a woman."

"How often am I to tell you, Dr. Wilton, that I am *not* a young woman, and never have been?" replied Evelyn, with a sigh; "sometimes I think that I was *born* old—"

"Well, well, my dear," said the doctor, who had guessed from the first that her restlessness was due to some mental disturbance, "please yourself, and come back to us refreshed in mind and body. And now, how is my friend Captain Philip?"

"I did not know he was a friend of yours, doctor. I wish I might have the privilege of calling him so. I consider Captain Philip a most remarkable, as well as estimable, man."

"If you are the head of Mount Eden Miss Rayne. he is the very soul of it."

"I quite agree with you. No one knows better than myself how hard he has worked to improve the property—nor how well he has succeeded."

"Has it never struck you as strange that so gifted a man should occupy so laborious a position? for Captain Philip's conversation has sometimes positively startled me. He has seen so much, and observed so keenly, that he is a perfect encyclopædia of knowledge; but, doubtless, you have remarked it as well as myself."

"No," she answered musingly; "he seldom talks to me except upon farm matters, and even about those he is not very communicative. I have always looked upon Captain Philip as a reserved and silent man."

"Indeed! that is strange. But you can see he is a gentleman, and, I should say, a man of family."

"Oh, yes. But he is only my land-agent, you see. We seldom meet, except on business.'

"His mode of life, too, is so uncommon," pursued the doctor—"to shut himself up in that tiny cottage, with his books and his pipe. It is like no one else. I'd lay anything I possess that that man has a secret in his past life that has made him turn hermit from the world."

"But not a disgraceful one. I would pledge my life on *that*," exclaimed Evelyn with sudden energy.

"Dear me, no! I hope I didn't intimate it," replied Dr. Wilton, "for it is the very furthest thing from my thoughts. The secret may be connected with others, perhaps,—with a scandal, or a misfortune, or a loss,—but still it is there, and if I heard to-morrow that Philip was a duke, I shouldn't be in the least degree surprised."

"More likely a martyr," said Evelyn. "His is just the nature, I should imagine, to sacrifice itself. But I hope he is happy now."

"I am sure it would make him happy to listen to your championship, Miss Rayne, for he has a very high opinion of you. But I think you might draw him a little more out of his shell, and, perhaps, infuse a little more brightness into his existence. He is a devourer of books, and an occasional loan from your library would doubtless be very acceptable to him."

"I am sure Captain Philip is welcome to borrow anything from Mount Eden; he ought to know that by this time," replied Evelyn, with some dignity, as though she did not quite like Dr. Wilton teaching her her duty towards her land-agent.

"True, but he is (as you observed just now) a reserved and silent man, and not likely to intrude his wishes on your consideration. From what his present mode of living may be a change, of course I cannot say, but I am sure that it *is* a change, and an unexpected one, and that Captain Philip's reserve covers, perhaps, a great sorrow. He is not of a subdued and silent disposition by nature; I could swear to that. Those grey eyes of his could sparkle with merriment, and I should like to see them do so."

"So should I," replied Miss Rayne.

And from that day she evinced a much greater interest and curiosity in Captain Philip, and often found herself speculating on his probable perplexities, and wondering, in a vague manner, if anything happened to herself, what would become of him in the future, and if he would ever take as much interest in another property as he did in Mount Eden.

When she told him, in confidence, that she was about to leave home for a time, and wished her departure to be kept a secret till she was gone, it would not have been extraordinary, even on a land-agent's part, to have displayed a little surprise for, in all the time that they had worked

together, Miss Rayne had never slept a night away from Mount Eden before. Yet Captain Philip did nothing of the kind. He listened with respectful attention to all she had to say, and then he asked her quietly,—

"Shall you remain away till after harvest?"

"*Till after harvest,*" stammered Evelyn, taken aback —"I don't know—I am not sure—it will depend entirely upon circumstances."

"I hope you will feel that you are entirely at liberty, and that Mount Eden is as safe in my hands as it would be in your own," replied Captain Philip. "Of course I shall send you daily reports of all that is going on here, and you will be able to judge how far, or for what length of time, we may be able to get on without you."

"I have no fear of that, Captain Philip, and my absence may be a very short one. But I want change sadly,—Dr. Wilton agreed with me at once on that score,—and as a stitch in time saves nine, the sooner I am off the better. And you understand, Captain Philip, why I do not confide my intention to the Featherstones beforehand. They are so good, and so fond of me, they would make such a fuss to find out the why and the wherefore, that they would torture me to death."

She spoke so petulantly, and she looked so harassed, that Captain Philip's heart for once got the better of his head.

"You are not *ill?*" he cried, in a tone of anxiety.

Evelyn's eyes turned on him with grave surprise. He misinterpreted the look for one of offence.

"Forgive me, Miss Rayne," he continued, coloring scarlet, "but you must know that your health and life are dear to all your—your—dependants. What would Mount Eden do without its mistress?"

But his words, instead of offending her, appeared to have raised her spirits.

"Very well, indeed," she answered brightly, "if it could only retain its overseer. Frankly, my dear friend, I am not ill in body, but I am very much harassed in my mind, and I am going away in order to have a little fight all by myself. Now, are you satisfied? Believe me that I have told this to no one but you—that I don't think (somehow) that I *could* tell it to any one but you. But I know that it is safe, and that you will respect my confidence."

He raised the hand she extended to him to his lips, but

he did not answer her. Both felt that no answer was needed. A few days after, Evelyn left Mount Eden, accompanied only by her maid Anna, and took her way to London, whence she despatched a letter, with a magnificent wedding present, to her dear little friend Agnes. The present—a *parure* of pearls—excited general admiration, but the contents of the letter raised a hue and cry. That Evelyn Rayne should have left home without giving them any intimation of the fact, was incredible to the Featherstones, who had shared her every thought for so many years past, and the enclosed note from Dr. Wilton, advising the step which she had taken, only increased their consternation. The first thing they did was to summon and question the doctor; the next to drive over to Mount Eden and see if they could get any satisfaction out of Captain Philip. But neither interview left them much the wiser. Dr. Wilton reiterated his simple statement that he considered Miss Rayne would be all the better for a little sea-air, and Captain Philip professed to know nothing of the matter. They had not even the consolation of writing Evelyn crossed sheets of reproach or entreaty, for she had said in her letter that she would be moving about for some time, but would let them know as soon as she was settled. Agnes wept copiously at the idea of being married without her bosom friend, and even wanted to put off her wedding on that account, but Mr. Featherstone would not allow of any postponement. One would have thought, to hear the banker talk of it, that he was almost anxious to get rid of his only child. Any way, the preparations went on, and but one person of them all guessed the real reason that the mistress of Mount Eden had found her strength unequal to the ceremony. That one was Jasper Lyle; and as he wandered about the gardens of Featherstone Hall, puffing at his cigarette, and remembered the grander beauties of Mount Eden, and the love of Evelyn Rayne, he gnawed his silky moustaches with rage against himself for having been such a blind fool as to let the woman and the acres slip out of his hands as he had done.

Meanwhile Evelyn, having found her way down to the Cornish coast, and settled herself and Anna in a weird-looking house, hanging over a cliff at Penzance, set to work determinedly to root that image from her heart, which (more from custom than from her knowledge of its worth) seemed to have imbedded itself there. Day after

day she wandered on the lonely beach, or sat on the rocks, watching the grand and restless ocean,—nowhere more grand or more restless than on the coast of Cornwall,—and arguing herself out of any remnant of feeling she might entertain for William Caryll. And to a woman of Evelyn's temperament, this was an easier task than some might imagine, for she could not love where she did not esteem. For years past she had been cherishing the memory of—not Will Caryll—but an ideal raised by her fancy from a half-forgotten dream, and now, when she saw him as he was,—fickle, shallow, and avaricious,—she shrunk from herself for having been so weak as to have bent her soul before him. It was herself whom she despised, not him.

"Is *that* the thing," she asked her heart, "which you have been cherishing and weeping over, and remaining faithful to, through good report and evil report, for ten long years—to which you would have given Mount Eden to be squandered, or neglected, or made ducks and drakes of—this false-tongued, effeminate *sham*, who can be content to marry an honest girl under an assumed name, and without telling her of his disgraceful antecedents? Oh, my poor Agnes! God grant that, whatever he is, he may have the grace to make you happy, to whom he will owe everything he possesses.

"I wonder if I have done right or wrong in following Captain Philip's advice, and would he have advised me as he did had he known the whole truth? I wish I had confided *everything* to him. I am sure he would have been true to the trust; and yet, how could I have betrayed poor Will? *That* would have made me almost as bad as himself. He *may* be truly repentant,—heaven grant he is,—and my denunciation of his past might have cast him on the world again—hardened and reckless. But I wish he had not professed to love me still. I could have forgiven his infidelity to me much sooner than *that*. For how can he love us both at the same time? And who could help loving my sweet, pure-hearted Agnes? He would indeed be a villain if he could be untrue to her. No; I will not believe so badly of poor Will. He is weak and foolish, and not entirely sincere,—a contemptible character viewed by the light of my experience,—and one which I feel amazed to think I can ever have considered worthy of my affection. Still, I *did* love him, and love is sacred even

when in ashes. But I thank God, who has opened my eyes to see him as he is, and given me strength to battle with myself, and cast him out of my heart for ever. Only —for Agnes' sake—I must make the best of him I can, and, for the sake of the past, I must try and secure his future. And the first step must be to annihilate the memory of *Will Caryll* for ever. That is why I feel I have done wisely to come down here and commune with myself. I should have been afraid to attend the wedding. A thousand impulses and fears might have upset me and made me betray myself, not one of which is love. The barb may be extracted, but the wound is sore still, and, until it is quite healed, it is better not to make too sure of myself. So, whatever my darling girl may think, I shall remain here till it is all over, and then, whilst they are on their honeymoon trip, I shall have time to grow strong and brave again, and be able to thank God for my deliverance."

She *was* strong and brave to be able to argue with herself on her weakness, and resolutely stamp it out; but the strongest natures are ever the most diffident of their own powers, and their modesty is the very weapon with which they conquer. Perhaps the part of the trial she was undergoing that Evelyn felt the most, was having to break the news to Agnes that it was impossible for her to be one of her bridesmaids, or even to be present at her wedding. She was compelled to excuse herself on the score of ill health, although she felt very guilty in doing so; but in reality it was not a falsehood, for doubt, and anxiety, and suspense had left her far from well. The marriage was fixed for the tenth of August, and on that morning Evelyn wandered far away upon the cliffs, walking fast, and wondering why her heart should be beating in such an irregular, jerky manner all the while. She would not look at her watch for fear of ascertaining just *when* the ceremony was taking place, but as she saw the boatmen and fishermen returning from their work, and knew that it must have struck twelve o'clock, she threw herself down on the thyme-scented turf, and dedicated a few tears to the for-ever-vanished memory of the past.

She could not know (strong-hearted woman as she was) how hard it is to detach one's self from an old love, until she had passed through the ordeal.

The knowledge of the worthlessness of the object of our

affections does not always accomplish it. We may despise ourselves for having loved so poor a creature, but still we can weep for our own folly and degradation; in fact, people weep for *themselves* far oftener than they do for others. How intensely selfish is our mourning for the dead. It is invariably on account of the pleasure *we* have lost, of the solace *we* miss, of the happiness they afforded *us; never* because they have changed for the worse, or because we think they mourn and grieve for what they have left behind. So with an unfaithful love; the sorest wound inflicted is to our mortified vanity, which cannot bear to see itself supplanted; therefore, to a sensible man or woman, it should be the lightest affliction of all.

Those few tears completed Evelyn's cure. They watered the grave of her early attachment, from which the ghost of Will Caryll, *as he had been*, never rose again.

When she had risen from her prostrate attitude and dried her tears, through which a little prayer of gratitude had found its way to heaven, she walked back to her temporary home with a light step, although she knew that the bells of St. Mary Ottery must be clashing out the announcement that Jasper Lyle and Agnes Featherstone were *one*. And her heart was light as well as her step. The suspense was over. The insurmountable barrier had been raised between them, and she felt that her cure was complete. Thenceforward, whatever she might be called upon to do to forward the interests of Jasper Lyle, she could never again associate him with the pitiful lover of her girlish days, Will Caryll. Indeed, she earnestly wished, for the man's own sake, to be able to dissever them. She wanted to respect Agnes' husband, and know that he was worthy of her. And now Evelyn felt that she could sit down, with a clear conscience, and try to find out the best points about him.

She quite astonished her maid Anna by the volubility with which she discussed the grand event of the day, and the eagerness with which she announced her intention of returning to Mount Eden during the following week.

She had seemed so listless and melancholy up to that period, Anna could not imagine what had worked such a change in her mistress—puzzle herself as she would.

But our maids do not know everything about us, though they would fain persuade themselves that they do, and

often make strange blunders, and work incalculable mischief, by piecing the wrong ends of the puzzle together.

Still, there are *some* things, thank God, which remain secrets between ourselves and Him.

CHAPTER XIX.

A GREAT SHOCK.

EVELYN descended to breakfast on the following morning, animated and cheerful. With the knowledge that Jasper Lyle and his wife had left Hampshire, she experienced a great longing to return to it. Mount Eden, with its fields golden unto harvest, and its orchards laden with ripe fruit, appeared fairer in her eyes than it had ever done before, and she knew she should be restless until she was once more on the spot to superintend everything.

"How wicked I have been," she thought to herself, as she stood at the window of her sitting-room, and looked out upon the foaming waves that dashed incessantly against the crag-bound coast—"how wrong to cherish such a rebellious spirit when I have so many mercies and so much pleasure left to me still. I, who was only a penniless orphan, without friends or prospects, hardly better than a maid-of-all-work (though that wasn't poor Aunt Maria's fault), the possessor of Mount Eden, with such a variety of interests to keep me occupied and happy from year's end to year's end. And how I love every stone upon the place. My beautiful Mount Eden! It would break my heart, I think, to give it up now even to a man I cared for. I love it from January to December—when it is laden with hoar-frost, or heavy with verdure—from the moment the first pale green buds break out upon the trees, to when they lie, brown and shrivelled, on the garden path. Every tender lamb and tiny chick that comes with the spring seem to appeal to my heart as if it was part of myself, and I am obliged to steel that heart against loving them for fear the pain of their unnatural fate should be too much for me. And then my darling horses, and my lovely dun and dappled milkers; my wealth of summer flowers and autumn fruits; my fair pasture lands and my

noble park. How can I be sufficiently thankful for all the benefits which have been showered on me—for all the interests my life contains? I am an ungrateful beast to have forgotten it for so long. An as for poor Will, it must be almost punishment enough for him to see what he has lost without making him suffer more. I am glad—yes, I am *glad* now that I did not prevent his marrying Agnes. She will raise and purify his life, and wash the bitterness from his memory; and I shall be always within reach to warn him should he show any signs of relapse. But he will not—I am sure of that. He would not run so terrible a risk again. Captain Philip's advice was sound, and good, and merciful. How I wish I were competent to attain his standard."

She finished off her reverie with a deep sigh, in the midst of which she was startled by hearing Anna exclaim, in rather an agitated voice,—

"If you please, Miss, Captain Philip is here, and wants to speak to you."

Evelyn came down from cloudland at once. A thousand terrors rushed into her mind. Mount Eden had been destroyed by fire— her favorite hunter had dropped down dead—burglars had broken into the big house, and stolen all her property—anything and everything but the right thing, combined to make her face turn grey with fright.

"Captain Philip, Anna! What on earth can bring Captain Philip down to Cornwall?"

"Oh, don't look like that Miss, please. It's nothing particular, you may be sure. Perhaps the Captain's come to tell you about the wedding yesterday."

The color returned to Evelyn's face, and a smile broke over it.

"Why, of course, Anna, that must be it. Show the captain up at once, please."

And in her relief from the greater dread, she overlooked the fact of how improbable it was that her overseer should forsake his trust in order to give her the details of Miss Featherstone's wedding.

She had hardly known how glad she should be to see Captain Philip again, but as he entered the room and advanced to greet her, she flushed to the roots of her hair with pleasure, and he colored almost as much as she did.

"Oh, Captain Philip, this is most unexpected," she said,

as they shook hands; "and I was just thinking of you, and dear old Mount Eden. When did you arrive?"

"I have only just arrived, Miss Rayne. I have been traveling all night."

She arched her eyebrows.

"Indeed! You have come to tell me about my darling child's wedding, of course. Well, how did it go off? Was everything right, and did you send over all the white flowers to be found in our conservatories?"

"I executed all your orders, Miss Rayne, to the letter. Both the Hall and the church were a mass of flowers, and everybody said it was the prettiest wedding that had ever been seen in St. Mary Ottery. I need not tell you that the bride looked lovely."

"Ah, my sweet Agnes," interposed Evelyn, her eyes over-brimming with tears of affection; "she could not fail to do *that*."

"And after the breakfast, at which there were upwards of a hundred guests, Mr. and Mrs. Jasper Lyle left for Teignmouth, in Devonshire, where they are to spend the honeymoon."

"But, Captain Philip," cried Evelyn suddenly, laying her hand upon his arm, "you did not come all the way down here to tell me this?"

"No, Miss Rayne, I have a graver motive for seeking you."

"Oh, tell it me quickly, for mercy's sake. Something is wrong at Mount Eden?"

"You are mistaken. Everything at Mount Eden is as right as it can be."

Evelyn turned deathly pale.

"It isn't Agnes," she muttered,—"or—or—him."

"No; but it concerns them nearly. Miss Rayne, you must prepare yourself for a shock. It is in order to save you as far as possible that I started off at once to anticipate the newspapers."

"Tell it me at once," she whispered.

"Mr. Featherstone has left us."

"*Mr. Featherstone!* and on his daughter's wedding day! How terrible. Who will break it to her?"

"I promised Mrs. Featherstone to see Mrs. Lyle before I returned. I shall go on to Teignmouth with as little delay as possible."

"But, Captain Philip, it must have been awfully sudden. When did it occur?"

"It *was* awfully sudden. He appeared quite well at the breakfast, but after the bride and bridegroom had left the Hall, he locked himself up in his room in order (as he said) to answer some important letters, and by six o'clock it was all over."

"Heart disease?" said Evelyn, in a low voice.

"No, Miss Rayne."

"What, then?"

"You will hardly believe it, but *he destroyed himself!*"

Evelyn gave vent to a loud ejaculation, and leant heavily against the table.

"Are you faint? Shall I call your maid?" said Captain Philip anxiously.

"No, no, I shall be all right in a minute," gasped Evelyn, with wide-open, horror-stricken eyes. "*Destroyed himself!* It is incredible. Mr. Featherstone destroyed himself! Oh, Captain Philip, are you *sure* you are not mistaken?"

"I wish I were, Miss Rayne; but it is, unfortunately, too true. I was the first person out of the house that poor Mrs. Featherstone sent for. I had not returned home half-an-hour. Of course I went back at once, and despatched the carriage for Dr. Wilton. But it was a mere matter of form. I knew that as soon as I saw the corpse. He had shot himself right through the brain. The roof of his head was blown off."

"Ah! Captain Philip, how horrible!—how horrible!" exclaimed Evelyn, closing her eyes at the sight her imagination had conjured up. "But what motive can he have had for such an act?"

'That is about the saddest part of the story, Miss Rayne. Mr. Featherstone left a letter behind him to explain his motives. It appears that the bank in which all his interests were placed has approached a crisis which it cannot possibly tide over, and everything will be swamped with it. Poor Mrs Featherstone is left without a farthing, and the Hall (with the property on which it stands) is already mortgaged up to the elbow."

"Oh, how selfish, how cruel, how cowardly of him!" cried Evelyn, with flashing eyes, "to leave a helpless woman to struggle alone against the tide which has over-

whelmed himself. If everything is gone, there was nothing else to lose. Why did he cast his courage and his honor after it? *This* was the moment to have buckled on his armor, and gone to work afresh to keep bread in the mouth of the wife who was dependent on him. I have always respected Mr. Featherstone—I can respect him no longer. How I wish that heaven had taken him long ago."

"Can you make no allowance, Miss Rayne, for a weak brain, turned by the shock of such a discovery?"

"I don't know. I think that true and disinterested love would keep the brain cool and the courage strong for the sake of those who trusted to it. Could *you* do such a cowardly thing, under *any* circumstances, as to take your own life, Captain Philip?"

"I think not, for I have had more than one temptation to do so, Miss Rayne. But neither could you. We possess energy of character, and an incentive to action is like a trumpet call to arms with us. But all people are not constituted alike, and God only knows how our poor friend may have struggled and fought before he was overcome."

Evelyn went up to her overseer, and clasped his hand.

"You are a good man, Captain Philip," she said, with moist eyes, "and I thank you for the lessons that you teach me. And now, you must take lunch with me before you start."

"No, thank you, Miss Rayne. I breakfasted as I came along, and must make my journey home by way of Teignmouth as soon as possible."

"But you cannot go till the train does, and I don't think there is another before two o'clock. That will just give Anna time to pack my things."

"Are you coming with me?" he asked quickly, in a tone of pleasurable anticipation.

"Not to Teignmouth," she answered, with a slight shudder. "No, I couldn't go *there*. It would seem like intruding on their privacy; and dear Agnes would not feel the sad news less from my lips than she will do from yours. I couldn't stay with her, you see. But I shall go at once to poor Mrs. Featherstone. She loves me, and I shall be a comfort to her, I know—and her only one. Agnes has her husband."

"Mrs. Featherstone will welcome you as an angel of mercy. Your name was the first she called upon when she understood the extent of her misfortune."

"Ah! why didn't you tell me that before?" said Evelyn reproachfully. "But there—you knew, of course, that my first act would be to return to her."

"I knew that you would do exactly what seemed best to you, and that, therefore, it would be best," replied Captain Philip, as he turned away.

Early in the afternoon they were both in the train again, though bound in different directions, and before nightfall Evelyn was in the arms of Mrs. Featherstone. Their meeting was necessarily a very painful one. The mistress of the Hall had been used to regard Evelyn as a second daughter, and to lean on her counsel and advice. In one sense it was a comfort to see her, but the occasion made all comfort seem void. The Hall looked more mournful than houses usually do under the influence of the shadow of death. The signs of the late wedding festivities, still hanging about it, formed a melancholy contrast to the shuttered windows and the subdued voices, whilst the knowledge (which seemed to have permeated the household) that all the luxury around them would pass away as soon as the corpse was carried over the threshold, served to increase the gloom. Mr. Rastall and Miss Macdonald, and the unfortunate little nephew (who happened to be home for his holidays) moved about like criminals doomed to die. They were indeed down in their luck. Under ordinary circumstances, they might have hoped to be remembered (if ever so slightly) in their brother-in-law's will, but they knew that the bankrupt suicide had had no power to leave them anything. They were so hopeless and so forlorn during that week of waiting, that they were almost driven to feel kindly towards each other, and to wonder whether their combined forces might not result in a successful effort to keep the wolf from the door.

Captain Philip returned to Mount Eden the following day. The bride had naturally been terribly upset, and the bridegroom had looked aghast at the dreadful news of which he had been the unwilling bearer; but, according to Mrs. Featherstone's express wishes, they had decided not to return to the Hall till the inquest was over.

"I did not break the whole extent of the misfortune to them," said Captain Philip, in relating the story to Evelyn Rayne, "because it seemed too terrible to blight the first days of their married life with the prospect of poverty, as

well as the certainty of death. But Mr. Jasper Lyle will have to 'jump around' a bit now, if he wishes to keep his wife in the position of a lady. I'm afraid three hundred a year won't go far towards it. Mr. Featherstone has behaved cruelly all round, Miss Rayne. I couldn't help agreeing with you on that score when I saw those two young people. Why did he let the marriage go on—the marriage on which he had promised Mr. Lyle to settle twenty thousand pounds—when he must have known he had no more power of doing so than I have?"

"Perhaps he was anxious (knowing what was before them) to secure his daughter's happiness at any cost," replied Evelyn gravely. "He loved Agnes devotedly. She was his idol. He must have suffered terribly in thinking of her."

"Well, married people have been happy on three hundred a year before now, and doubtless may be again. But I should be sorry to try the experiment with Mr. Lyle. Why didn't Mr. Featherstone leave it to his honor? Then we should have known what stuff he is made of. As it is now, he has a right to consider he has been cheated."

"Oh, I don't think W— I mean, I don't think—at least, I sincerely hope Mr. Lyle would never prove so ungrateful as that," said Evelyn lamely; "you don't allow his love for my darling Agnes to weigh in the scale at all, Captain Philip."

"Oh, doubtless he loves her,—I don't see how he could well help doing so just at present, Miss Rayne,—but you don't need me to remind you that courtship and marriage are two very different things, and that no man likes to lose twenty thousand pounds. It will put Mr. Lyle's love for his wife to the test,—there's no doubt of that,—and I for one shall be very glad to see it turn up trumps."

Evelyn had expected that the poor little bride would return home in a very grave and melancholy mood, but she was quite unprepared to see how white and drawn her face had become in one short week (which should have been so happy), and to hear the cry of despair with which she threw herself into her arms.

"Agnes, Agnes!" she exclaimed, "try to control yourself for your poor mother's sake. She has so much to bear, remember. You have your husband's love to support you, but she is left alone in the world. This is the time when

you must prove your affection for her by teaching her how to be brave."

"But, Evelyn," exclaimed Agnes, gazing up into her friend's face with terror-stricken eyes, "what does mamma mean by saying we are beggars? Surely papa was very rich. He said he should settle twenty thousand pounds on me on my wedding day. Shall I have to give it up to mamma?"

A faint feeling of disappointment passed through Evelyn's mind. She could not believe that Agnes was mercenary, and yet, what test had the poor child ever had till now by which to try the metal that she was made of? Evelyn would have kept the news of her father's bankruptcy from her till after the funeral, but Mrs. Featherstone had evidently disclosed it, and there was no use in attempting further deception.

"*You* can never be a beggar, my darling," she said, as she stroked the girl's sunny hair; "Mr. Lyle has an income of his own, and, though it is small, it is enough to live upon."

But Agnes pushed the loving hand away almost brusquely, as she looked up again.

"Three hundred a year!" she exclaimed contemptuously. "As if any one could live upon *that!* Evelyn, you must tell me the truth. Where is papa's money gone? Where is my twenty thousand pounds? How are we going to live in the future?"

"Oh, Agnes, darling! I would like to have kept this extra trouble from you for a little while, but perhaps it is better you should know the worst at once. Your father's bank failed, dear, and every shilling he possessed went with it. It was because he could not bear the shame and the misery of it all that he was rash enough to take his own life. Don't blame him, dear. Pity him and pray for him; he must have suffered so much before he acted as he did."

But Agnes was silent as though she had been turned to stone.

"We *are* beggars," she muttered at last—"poor mamma and I—beggars indeed."

"Mrs. Featherstone has received a very kind letter from a sister of hers in Edinburgh," said Evelyn, trying to speak more cheerfully.

"From Aunt Graham, I suppose?" interposed Agnes,

"Yes, from Mrs. Graham,—that was the name,—asking her and Miss Macdonald to go and make their home at Langbrae as soon as the funeral is over, and I think your mamma has accepted the offer. She must leave the Hall, you know, Agnes dear, and everything in it; and to find herself amongst her own relations will be the greatest solace she could receive."

"And we shall have nothing, then—*nothing*," repeated Agnes.

"Oh, my darling, don't say that. You will have your husband, and if his income is not sufficient for your need, he has two strong arms to work for you. Indeed, Agnes, except for the terrible loss of your poor father, I don't think you are to be pitied."

"Let me go and tell Jasper," said Mrs. Lyle, as she untwined herself in an indifferent manner from Evelyn's arms. "He knows no more of this than I did, and I dread to think what he will say when he hears it."

And she left the room with such a pitiful and woe-begone expression on her countenance, as made Evelyn fear that she cared more for the loss of the money than she did for the death of her father. As soon as the funeral was over, there was obliged to be a discussion of ways and means (for the creditors would not permit the unfortunate family to remain at Featherstone Hall one day longer than was necessary), and then the truth came out. Mrs. Featherstone and Miss Macdonald were to seek an asylum with their sister, who had also invited the invalid nephew to her house until some arrangement could be made for him, and Mr. Rastall was to go to a distant relative, who promised him employment on his farm, but the bride and bridegroom seemed unable to form any plans for themselves. Jasper Lyle, whose brow was lowering and gloomy, confessed himself unable to meet any present expenses. He had anticipated a considerable portion of his annual allowance to pay for his wedding journey, and had fully expected to receive the fulfilment of his father-in-law's promise on his return.

"He told me" (he said) "before ever I proposed for Agnes, that he was prepared to settle twenty thousand pounds on her. He repeated it afterwards. I never could have afforded to marry her otherwise, and I consider that I have been shamefully taken in and defrauded, and any other man would say the same."

"That may be, sir," exclaimed Captain Philip, stepping hastily forward, "but you must not, and you *shall* not, speak of the late Mr. Featherstone in such terms in the presence of his widow and his daughter and his friends. Whatever your disappointment may be, you will please to keep it to yourself *here* and *now!*"

"Thank you, Captain Philip; that is just what I should have wished to say," added Evelyn, for the cruel circumstances under which she had met him again had robbed her of all nervousness in the presence of her cousin.

Lyle turned and looked at her as she spoke, and for a moment she saw Will Caryll before her, with the ugly frown he was wont to bestow on her outspoken candor.

"I don't know," he said, addressing Captain Philip, "what right *you* have, sir, to call me to order. I believe you are Miss Rayne's overseer—"

"And her friend and adviser," interposed Evelyn.

"Perhaps, but not mine, and as I happen to be related to the family, I consider I may choose my own words. This unfortunate affair has put me in a hole as well as everybody else, and I should like to ascertain from the solicitors whether Mr. Featherstone's daughter has not (under the circumstances) some claim upon her late father's property."

"Not the slightest, sir," replied one of the lawyers in attendance; "no one has any claim except the creditors. Mr. Featherstone not having (unfortunately) made any separate settlement upon his wife."

"And I should have given it up if he had," sobbed the good-hearted widow. "I would have gone out charring sooner than have kept money that was due to others."

"Oh, Evelyn, darling, isn't it all miserable?" cried Agnes, clinging to her friend.

But Evelyn's only reply was to clasp her still closer to her bosom.

"Well, then, it's a deuced awkward confession," said Jasper Lyle, with a glance round the room as if he wanted to escape; "but I've nowhere to take my wife to, and no money to pay for her expenses. The only plan I can think of is to return to Italy (as I wished to do before the wedding took place, and if I had been allowed to carry out my intentions, I should have been saved all this bother), and see about re-investing my capital in England. I am doing

nothing with it there, and meanwhile, Mrs. Featherstone, I suppose there is no objection to your daughter remaining with you?"

"But she *can't* remain with me, Mr. Lyle. How can you ask such a thing, when you have heard that I myself have to live upon charity? It is unreasonable of you."

"Oh, Jasper, darling, take me to Italy with you. Don't leave me behind," cried Agnes, as she flew to her husband's arms.

But his threatened perplexities had driven the lover *pro tem.* from Jasper Lyle's mind. He had always been more ready to be made love to than to make love, and he put his young wife's arms away almost roughly.

"Don't worry me, Agnes, just now, when every nerve is on the rack. Give me time to think, for God's sake. How can I afford to take you on such an expensive journey? I have barely enough coin to land myself there. I was never placed in such an awkward dilemma before."

Agnes began to sob bitterly, when Evelyn approached them.

"Mr. Lyle," she began, in her soft rich voice, "do not perplex yourself further. Leave Agnes with me. You know how very dear she is to me—of the care I shall take of her, and that she has been almost as much at home at Mount Eden as she has been here. Agnes, darling, will it not be best? Trust yourself to me, and leave your husband unencumbered. He will not be absent very long, and when he has settled his money matters, and returned to England, we can arrange something for your future. My dear little sister,—my almost child,—come back to Mount Eden with me, and see what we can do to make the time pass until Mr. Lyle rejoins you."

"Oh, Evelyn, that is just like you. It will be the very thing," said Mrs. Featherstone.

"I shall be at ease now. I could trust her with you *for ever*," added Jasper Lyle, as he clasped Miss Rayne's hand with rather too palpable a pressure.

"And what does Agnes say?" inquired Evelyn gently.

"Oh take me home, Evelyn—take me home. I don't know what to say or think. Everything around me seems as black as ink, and I feel as if I should never be happy again. But let me go with you. I shall have rest there. Let me go with you."

So the next day, Mr. Jasper Lyle (though not without having received a suspiciously thick envelope, without the cognizance of the others, from Miss Rayne's hands) took his departure for Italy, and the poor iittle mourning bride returned to Mount Eden with her friend. Exhausted as she was with grief at parting from her husband and her home, she was thankful to seek repose, and, as soon as she knew that she had fallen to sleep, like a tired child, with the tears yet undried upon her rose-leaf cheeks, Evelyn crept downstairs, and stood at the open French window of her library, looking out upon the night. How different was this home coming from the one she had anticipated!

But a few days back she had been revelling in the thought of seeing Mount Eden again. And now she could think of nothing but the sad scenes she had passed through, and the change that had fallen on the fortunes of her friends. And yet how peaceful it all looked. The dark-blue sky was studded with stars, the moon sailed like a queen above the tree tops, and everything was as still as the poor suicide sleeping in the graveyard. Evelyn rested her cheek upon the lintel of the door-post, and gave herself up to thought. Presently the perfume of a cigar was wafted on the night air, and then the illuminated tip could be seen approaching though the darkness.

"Captain Philip," she exclaimed, "is that you? I was feeling so lonely all by myself."

"Has Mrs. Lyle left you?" he said, stopping beside her.

"I have left her, dear child, for she has cried herself to sleep. This is a sad ending to her honeymoon, Captain Philip."

"Sadder than one can express. I told you this would prove the test of Mr. Jasper Lyle's affection for his wife. What do you think of it now, Miss Rayne!"

"Don't ask me. I want so much to hope the best."

"For her, or for—*him?*"

Evelyn started.

"For *her*, of course. Hasn't she been my dearest friend for years past? Why should you suspect me of being interested in—*him?*"

"Only as her husband; and, as matters are now, it is difficult to separate their interests. Do you believe he will return?"

"Captain Philip, what are you dreaming of? Not return to Agnes—to my poor child! He *could* not be so base. I am quite angry with you for the suspicion."

"I am sorry to have made you angry but I only asked for your opinion. *I* don't think he *will*."

CHAPTER XX.

SETTLED AT MOUNT EDEN.

Evelyn Rayne had affected to ridicule Captain Philip's belief concerning Jasper Lyle, and yet, as the days went on, her mind recurred to it again and again. His behavior was certainly not that of an ardent lover, nor did he seem in any particular hurry to return to England. His first letter, announcing his arrival in Florence, was followed by the silence of a week, during which Agnes moped and refused to eat, and nearly fretted herself to death wondering what could be the reason she heard nothing further from her recreant bridegroom. But the answers to her imploring and impassioned letters were few and far between, and seldom contained any reference to his money affairs, or to the subject that lay nearest his wife's heart. At last, indignant for Agnes' sake, and dreading she scarcely knew what from her former experience of her cousin's shifty character, Evelyn took it upon herself to write to Lyle, and upbraid him for his prolonged absence. She said nothing of her intention to others, but she used her pen freely in Agnes' cause. It was by her own forbearance (and, perhaps, guilty silence) that Jasper Lyle stood in the position of husband to her dearest friend, and she would not stand by quietly and see her heart broken by his palpable neglect. Besides, all the neighbors were commenting on his extraordinary behavior, and she almost *commanded* him, by the power she held over him, to come to Mount Eden without any further delay. She wound up her letter in these words:—

"If you have deceived us with regard to your supposed income, and have no money with which to pay your journey back again, you must know you have but to apply to me to get what is necessary. I would sooner part with

thousands than see my darling girl fret as she is doing now. I enclose you notes for twenty pounds, and beg you will return as soon as you receive it, or I will not answer for the consequences to her health. All arrangements with regard to your future can be made on your arrival."

The consequence of this epistle, with the promises it contained, was that in another week Mr. Jasper Lyle, apparently as affectionate as any wife could desire, was holding Agnes in his arms again, and raising the poor foolish girl to a seventh heaven of delight. It had not been difficult for him to read between the lines of his cousin's letter.

"It's all right," he thought, with a sneer at her supposed weakness; "Eve cares for me still,—there's no doubt of that,—and it's the best consolation I could have for having let her and Mount Eden slip through my fingers. '*You must know you have but to apply to me to get what is necessary.*' That's it. A little judicious treatment, and I shall as good as share her income, and certainly come in for half the comforts of Mount Eden. And so I ought, for Eve is standing in my shoes, and she knows it. I don't think it will be difficult to persuade her to let us stay on there—what with her love for Agnes, and her old *penchant* for my unworthy self, and if I can get her to give me the place of that fellow Philip, I don't see why we shouldn't turn into a regular happy family."

And so he came back post-haste to try his chance. His wife was naturally delighted to welcome him. She loved him with all a girl's first infatuation, and had no suspicion that he had deceived her upon any point. His poverty she had known before she married him. It was only her poor father who had been to blame in the transaction, and his part in it they had best not remember. Her husband had returned to her. That was enough, and (for the first few days) all that she knew or cared for.

But the mistress of Mount Eden, though perfectly courteous and kind, did not welcome him with the same enthusiasm, and Jasper Lyle soon perceived it. The best suit of rooms was prepared for his wife and himself, the servants treated them with the utmost deference, and all the luxuries with which Mount Eden abounded were placed at their disposal. But yet Evelyn, while she lavished caresses and words of endearment on Agnes, seemed always

grave when she addressed her husband. Mr. Lyle felt he must put this right. His wife's affection was nothing to him compared to Evelyn's good-will. The one meant *money*; the other was rather a nuisance than otherwise. So, one evening, when Agnes was safe in bed, he descended to the library, where he knew that Evelyn was in the habit of sitting up and reading long after the household had retired to rest. She started slightly as she saw him enter the room, but her thoughts flew immediately to Agnes.

"Anything the matter? Does Agnes want me?" she exclaimed.

"Agnes is fast asleep," replied Jasper Lyle, taking the chair next her; "so, I believe, is everybody else, except you and me."

"And why have you come here, then?"

He regarded her with a smile of incredulity.

"My dear Eve, is it necessary to ask? Are we not cousins—almost brother and sister? Is it not natural I should like sometimes to speak to you out of earshot of the prying and curious?"

Evelyn bit her lip, and looked annoyed.

"I thought," she answered, "that we had come to an agreement to drop the subject of our relationship—that, from the moment of your marriage, you were to be to me only Jasper Lyle, and I—your wife's most intimate friend?"

"And so we are—before strangers. But blood is thicker than water, Eve, and surely we need not keep up the farce when we are alone."

"Excepting that every lapse from our self-imposed formality is another risk for you. You cannot be too careful, Will. Your being my poor Agnes' husband will have no power to save you from the consequences of your crime if you lay yourself open to discovery. It will only drag her down with yourself."

"Don't be hard, Eve. I have lost so much (take it altogether) that I don't seem to mind what happens to me next."

"Surely you care for your wife?" cried Eve indignantly.

"Yes, yes, of course; but you care for her far more than I do, and that is her best safeguard. You *know* I couldn't have married her, or any one who had not a settlement. Say what you will, Eve, this marriage has been

a cruel disappointment to me, as well as an injury to her. How am I to support her? That is the question."

"You must *work*, as other men have done before you," replied Evelyn; "my Agnes is well worth working for."

"But in what capacity? When it comes to baptismal certificates, and credentials, and all that sort of flummery, where shall I stand?"

"Will," said Eve presently, "since you *are* here, tell me the truth. Have you any income at all? You told me when first we met, that your employer had left you five thousand pounds, and that you had bought an annuity with it, but somehow I never quite believed the story. Have you three hundred a year or not?"

He fidgeted about his chair for some minutes before he could find an answer. Then he said:—

"It was *three* thousand pounds I mentioned, was it not?"

"No; it was *five* thousand," replied Evelyn determinately, "and you declared you drew three hundred a year from it. Is it the case? I insist upon hearing the truth from you."

"Well, Eve, whatever you may have imagined," he said at last, "it was not as much as five thousand. It was deposited in the bank of Florence, and at the time I proposed to Agnes I fully intended to get a good investment for it. But, what with the expenses antecedent to my marriage, and the trip to Teignmouth, and—and—subsequent necessity for ready cash, I—I—"

Evelyn rose suddenly from her seat, and walked up to the mantelpiece.

"You mean," she said indignantly, "that you have *nothing?*"

"My dear Eve, you were always good at guessing, and that is really the truth. Unfortunate devil that I am—*I have nothing.* I trusted to the fine promises of my father-in-law, and this is the end of it. Agnes and I are penniless."

"My poor Agnes. My poor darling. Reared in every luxury," murmured Evelyn, "how will she bear the life before her?"

"And if I hadn't been a poor weak fool, listening to evil counsel and unable to resist the first temptation offered to me, I might have had Mount Eden to lay at her feet today," continued Jasper Lyle.

But it was doubtful if Miss Rayne heard him.

"Will," she exclaimed, turning round upon him, "you *must* work. It is imperative."

"I know that, Eve, and I am willing enough, but what can I do? *You* know the obstacles that lie in my path."

"We will overcome them," she hastily replied. "You are still young. You must begin life afresh, and I will exert my influence to the uttermost to procure you employment suited to your ability. And till I am successful, you and Agnes must look upon Mount Eden as your home. I cannot—I *will* not let my darling girl go forth into a world she has never yet encountered till you have prepared a home for her."

This was just what he had wished for—board and lodging free at Mount Eden until the day he could get something equivalent. And he resolved that day should be long in coming.

"My dear Eve," he ventured to say, as he drew near to her, and tried to take her hand, "how good you are. You have not quite forgotten your poor, graceless cousin, whatever you may think, no more than he has ever forgotten you. Agnes and I will accept your hospitality for a little while, till I have had time to look around me, and consider what is best to be done. I have been thinking ever since I ascertained the miserably low state of my exchequer, that —that—"

"Well?" said Evelyn, in a voice that was almost harsh, and certainly constrained.

"That perhaps you might find me work to do upon Mount Eden. I am not proud, you know, and you seem to employ a good many fellows of different sorts on the estate. That chap Philips (or whatever his name is), for instance. I dare say you pay him a big salary. Why shouldn't you let me do his work for you? I'll be bound I could do it just as well, and at about half the expense."

Evelyn turned eyes of calm contempt upon him

"Are you suggesting that I should send Captain Philip away, Will, and put you in his vacant shoes? Do you know what Captain Philip does for me—that he is my right hand (or rather, I should say, my head), and not only directs the whole of the farming operations, but receives my rents and pays my laborers, and is, in fact, the ostensible landlord of Mount Eden?"

"And why shouldn't *I* be so?" demanded Jasper Lyle. But he had gone a step too far.

"You *forget*," said Evelyn coldly, "that such a situation can only be held by a man who bears a strictly upright character. I am sorry for you," she continued, seeing his look of shame. "I know such truths are hard to bear, but you should be wiser than to provoke them. And I have not the least intention of parting with Captain Philip's services, even for *you*."

"I suppose you will always throw it in my teeth," he murmured, and then she feared she had been cruel.

"No, Will; don't say that. But you would not be competent to fill Captain Philip's place under any circumstances; besides, my people are all used to him. But I will think about giving you employment on Mount Eden. I will consult Captain Philip on the subject, and see what I can do. Meanwhile, you must make yourself and Agnes happy here, and believe how heartily welcome you are to anything I may possess."

"I knew you would say that if ever we came together again," he said, with an attempt to fondle her; "I felt, Eve, that you would never quite forget the time when we swore that, whichever got Mount Eden should share it with the other—the time when we fully believed we should enjoy it together as man and wife. These were happy days. I would to God they could come over again."

"Mr. Lyle," said Evelyn calmly, "I have been betrayed once or twice this evening into addressing you by the old name, because it is very difficult to shake off the habits of one's youth, but it must be for the last time—indeed, after to-night, I must decline to speak to you alone. We entered into that compact, you may remember, when I consented you should marry Agnes. The time you speak of is as dead as you wish your identity to be, and I have nothing in common with Jasper Lyle, except as it relates to my dearest friend. If I can do anything for you in the future, it will be done for *her* sake, not for yours; and the return I exact from you is, that you shall never again attempt to speak to me alone, nor to call me by my Christian name, nor to betray, in any way, that you have ever known me, except as Miss Rayne of Mount Eden."

"You are cruel to me," he whispered.

"I am not cruel—I am only just. Nothing should, nor

will pass between us but what Agnes may hear; and I put it to you if you will improve your position by forcing me to let her know *who* you are, and *what* you are."

"I know that I am at your mercy, Eve—I mean *Miss Rayne*," he answered bitterly; "and that you can dictate what terms you choose."

"I am glad you know it, and those are the only terms on which you can remain at Mount Eden. You must decide whether they are worth your acceptance; and now, I am going to bed. I am glad you have been open with me, and if I can ameliorate your condition, I will. Good-night."

She passed from the room without even touching his hand as she spoke, and notwithstanding his effrontery, Jasper Lyle felt small.

The next day, when Evelyn and Captain Philip had ridden round the farm and outlying cattle sheds, she turned to him somewhat abruptly, and said,—

"Have we any particular work to do this morning, Captain Philip?"

"I think not, Miss Rayne, unless you wish to superintend the drainage of the Long Acre."

"But the men are only excavating to-day. It will be time enough to look them up in the afternoon—and I have something particular to talk to you about. Can you spare an hour to ride along the St. Ottery Road with me?"

Captain Philip flushed up to his bronzed forehead with pleasure.

"You know, Miss Rayne, that my time is yours."

"All right, then. Let us be off. I am going to consult you, Captain Philip, as a friend, and as a friend I trust you will set me right where I am wrong. I had a most unpleasant conversation with Mr. Lyle last night. His prolonged absence in Italy rather raised my suspicions, and in answer to a point blank question which I put to him regarding his means of keeping Agnes, he was obliged to confess that he has *nothing!*"

"An adventurer—I thought as much," said her companion.

"I admire him for one thing," resumed Evelyn. "I don't think he married his wife under false pretences. I remember Agnes telling me, when she announced her engagement, that her lover had no fortune, but that her father had said that should make no difference, as he had

plenty for both. He also promised to settle twenty thousand pounds on her on her wedding day, and the deed was actually drawn up, and ready for signature, when Mr. Featherstone destroyed himself. So that, when Mr. Lyle talks as if *he* were the injured party, I cannot quite disagree with him."

"Perhaps not. At the same time, no man of spirit would consent to be entirely dependent on his wife. He would follow a profession of his own, however small the proceeds of it might be. Under the circumstances, I cannot understand Mr. Featherstone giving his daughter to a man without a farthing."

"Mr. Featherstone believed Mr. Lyle to have three hundred a year. I think I have told you the same story."

"And has he *not*, then, Miss Rayne?"

"I am afraid so. He stammered and stuttered a great deal over the confession last night, but finally admitted that his money is all gone. I suppose that, in the prospect of his marriage, and relying on Mr. Featherstone's promises, he has been entrenching on his principal."

"It must have been a grand principal," laughed Captain Philip.

"I expect it was only a thousand or two," replied Evelyn; "but that is nothing to the purpose now. The question is, Captain Philip, how is he to support his wife? It is cruelly hard on her, who has never known what it is to have a wish ungratified since she was born. But Mr. Lyle seems willing to work, and has, indeed, applied to me for employment. Can we give him anything to do on Mount Eden?"

Captain Philip turned his whole body round in his saddle to regard her.

"You mean, Miss Rayne, can we *make* anything for Mr. Lyle to do?"

"Well, yes. But it comes to the same thing."

"Not quite. In the first place, what *can* he do?"

"I don't know. Anything, I suppose, than an ordinary man could do."

"Would you like him to take *my* place? Shall I turn out?" demanded Captain Philip.

Evelyn flashed one look at him from her speaking eyes, but answered quickly,—

"*You* are not an ordinary man, Captain Philip, and I

don't know what I said to call for your remark. But, of course, you were only jesting. But could not Mr. Lyle relieve you of some of your work,—you do far too much, you know,—and so give you more time for yourself?"

"Miss Rayne," said the overseer, "you honored me, on commencing this conversation, by saying you wished to consult me as a friend. As a friend, then, may I ask if you know anything more of Mr. Lyle than that he is Miss Featherstone's husband? Do you know anything of his former life or antecedents?"

Evelyn changed color. She was not used to telling falsehoods, and this was a difficult thrust to parry. She was compelled to resort to evasion.

"Isn't it enough for me to know that he is Agnes' husband, and wants money to support her?"

"Not quite—if you intend to trust him with money of your own. Forgive me for speaking plainly, but you must consider the interests of Mount Eden. Honestly, I have never quite liked or trusted Mr. Lyle. He does not appear to me open or at his ease; and I strongly suspect there is something in the background he does not care to allude to. Sometimes I have even thought that he does not go by his own name."

Evelyn started, and Captain Philip noticed it.

"What makes you think so?" she demanded breathlessly; "has he ever betrayed himself—I mean, has he ever said anything to justify your opinion?"

"No; it is only an idea, and I may be wrong, but I have seen all sorts of people in my time, Miss Rayne, and have become very 'cute. I notice that Mr. Lyle never refers to his family or his past life. He seems to be an unit in the world, and that is unusual in a bridegroom."

"Oh, never mind his family nor his past life," cried Evelyn, almost fretfully. "He is Agnes' husband—nothing can undo that, nor the necessity that he should work for her. Do try and *make* a place for him, Captain Philip—a mere honorary appointment, if you like. I have promised they shall stay on at Mount Eden till he has a home to take my dear girl to, and—"

"You have *promised* they shall live at Mount Eden?" exclaimed the overseer interrupting her in his surprise.

"Yes. Why not? How could I have acted otherwise? Oh, Captain Philip, you don't understand me! I care

nothing about Mr. Lyle. I don't trust him, perhaps, any more than you do. I—I—wish, in fact, he had never come here. But—think of my Agnes, and how long she has been my most loving friend. There is nothing in this world I care for as I do for her. How can I let her leave me for a man who has no money to support her on—who has not, as I believe, the capability to make money? He was always shifty—I mean," said Evelyn, quickly correcting herself, "I can see his has been an unreliable character from boyhood."

"Oh!" replied Captain Philip dubiously, "you're 'cuter' than I am, Miss Rayne."

"Never mind what I am; but tell me if (loving my darling girl as I do) I could let her leave Mount Eden now? When I first came here with Uncle Roger, a heart-sick, friendless girl,—as penniless as she is now,—her parents were like a father and mother to me, and gave me their daughter for a sister. That is ten years ago, and never once, till this terrible calamity fell on their house, did they fail to show me sympathy, and kindness, and hospitality. Tell me, Captain Philip, *could* I do less for their child now—could I refuse to share my plenty with her, or to afford her the shelter of my roof?"

"No; *you* could not. I fully admit that," replied Captain Philip.

"And how can I do so without admitting her husband to the same advantages? So—for Agnes' sake—you see we *must* find something to employ him at Mount Eden."

"Very well, Miss Rayne, it shall be done. You had better give him a place under me, and I can employ him to overlook the mechanical labor—such as draining, and stacking, and storing—whilst I am busy with the building leases and landlord's rents."

"Thank you, Captain Philip. You always help me out of a difficulty. There are other reasons, which I cannot tell you, which make me glad to be able to oblige Mr. Lyle. And, indeed, I consider it part of my responsibility as a landowner to help those who are less fortunate than myself."

"Then you act up to your principles nobly, Miss Rayne. No one can complain of your being backward to help the needy. Your tenantry say they never had so generous a landlord before."

"I am glad of it," replied Evelyn. "I only hope, if my Cousin Hugh ever comes back to claim Mount Eden, that he will not call me to account for wasting the property."

"How curious it seems to hear you so often allude to the idea of this fabulous cousin turning up again, Miss Rayne. One would think you wanted him to do so."

"Well, I couldn't be *sorry*—it would be too unnatural; and I daresay he would let me live in a little corner of Mount Eden still. Uncle used to say he was such a dear, generous-hearted boy."

"I think it is great waste of time even speculating on the chances of a drowned man appearing to bother you," said Captain Philip, with a shrug of the shoulder.

"But do you know I often do," replied Evelyn eagerly. "I dream, sometimes, that he has come back, and that I am *so* pleased. Perhaps I shouldn't be in reality, but still I should be thankful that the real heir had come into his birthright, and I think poor dear uncle would see it, and be thankful too."

"Had you no other cousins, beside Hugh Caryll, Miss Rayne?" asked Captain Philip.

Evelyn started again. Was it possible that her overseer could *suspect* the truth? But she managed to laugh as she replied,—

"Several; but they mostly died young, and I lived at Liverpool, away from the rest of the family."

"I have heard your late uncle's clerk, Mr. Gamble, mention a William Caryll, who once expected to inherit Mount Eden."

"Oh, yes," replied Evelyn hurriedly, with a face of scarlet, "I *had* a cousin William, but he was unfortunate, and—and—we never speak of him. Captain Philip, this is a lovely bit of turf. Let us have a canter, and blow all our disagreeable thoughts away."

And so she broke off the conversation, and gave him no further opportunity to refer to her Cousin William.

That evening she disclosed to Mr. Lyle, in the presence of his wife, what she intended to do for them both. You may be sure she made no favor of her benefits. On the contrary, she mentioned the situation as one that required filling, and the handsome salary she had decided to give with it, as a mere nominal remuneration for Mr. Lyle's services. Both husband and wife were very grateful to

her—he, perhaps, the more so of the two, as he knew how little he deserved her kindness, and how much he stood in need of her assistance. Agnes, who knew nothing of the value of money, nor the difficulty of making it, thought much more of the pleasure of living with her friend than of anything else.

"Oh, my darling Evelyn," she cried, as she flung herself into her arms, "to live always with you, and at Mount Eden! Could anything be more delightful? Isn't it what I have always longed for? Used I not to cry, when a child, every time the servant appeared to fetch me home; and wasn't it the greatest treat in the world to be allowed to stop and sleep with you? And now I shall be able to see you every day. Oh, I *am* pleased! And, Jasper, you are a darling clever thing to be able to look after Mount Eden for her. I declare I feel almost glad we were cheated out of that settlement."

"Not quite *that*, my darling," said Evelyn, as she pressed the sweet face against her bosom and thanked God silently for giving her the power to shield it from the sharp sting of poverty; "I would make you independent of me to-morrow if I could; but since that cannot be, we will be thankful that (whatever has been taken from us) we still have *each other*."

And Jasper Lyle, regarding them, wondered if, when Evelyn alluded to her losses, she was thinking of *him*.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE MARQUETRIE CABINET.

JASPER LYLE was duly established in the position that had been made for him, and the weeks went on. But before the harvest had been garnered in, Evelyn was forced to acknowledge that she had taken a responsibility on herself that bid fair to yield more pain than pleasure. All her love for Agnes, and her strong desire to shield her from the hard knocks of the world, could not shut her eyes to the fact that Mr. Lyle was an element of discord, hitherto unknown on her peaceful and well-ordered estate. Complaint after complaint reached her ears, not only of his indolence, but

his insolence, which neither tenants nor laborers would put up with. He walked about Mount Eden, indeed, as if he were the lord of the soil, and people were beginning to ask who *was* this insolent upstart, and what Miss Rayne was about to allow him to usurp her rightful authority.

If he were set to superintend the excavation of a drain, he walked away before the work was half over, leaving the men to their own devices. If he sauntered for an hour into the harvest-field, he found the heat and the fatigue too much for him, and finished the afternoon upon the sofa, in company with his cigar and a novel. Evelyn had generously told him to select which animal he liked best in her stables, to be kept for his especial use; but he chose to ride all of them by turn, and, being no horseman, he usually lamed or over-heated them, and once he was thrown, to the stablemen's intense delight.

"It's *wicked*, Miss, the way Mr. Lyle 'ammers 'em along the road, as if 'osses was made of iron," the head groom remarked deprecatingly to Evelyn, who loved her horses like friends, and would indignantly resolve to tell Jasper he should never ride any of them again.

But, somehow, when the opportunity occurred, she never seemed to have the courage to do so. She *could* not forget who he was, nor that they had sworn to share Mount Eden together. *That* was the secret of her forbearance.

But Captain Philip never carried any stories of Jasper Lyle to Miss Rayne. He knew she heard them, but he would not be the one to tell them to her. In the first place, he did not quite feel as if he could trust himself—he hated the man too much. In the second, he was sure the arrangement would never last, but he preferred it should come to a close through the means of others. So he stood aloof, and held his tongue when the subject of Mr. Lyle came on the *tapis*. He admired Evelyn's motives for befriending him, and he did not think she whould like the person any the better who opened her eyes to his shortcomings.

But Evelyn could not fail to see it all for herself, and another thing with it, namely, that Jasper Lyle was in every respect the same man that Will Caryll had been, only with his vices and weaknesses strengthened, instead of destroyed, by time. She could remember her cousin's selfishness in the days gone by, his want of truth, his airy

method of treating advice, the unconcerned way in which he slurred his duty. She had not thought so much of it then. She had been a child in ignorance of the world and the men who lived in it, and if Will's carelessness shocked her, she felt sure he had never intended it to do so. But now she regarded him by the light of experience. She had met with honest and true, and industrious men, and knew their value, and she could see plainly what a frivolous useless butterfly Will Caryll had become.

To an energetic nature like Evelyn Rayne's, the sight was a sickening one, but beyond a few mild remonstrances, she never rebuked him for his laziness or his presumption. She was so terribly afraid of what he might say or do if he lost his temper with her or himself. And it was because he had guessed her feelings on the subject that Jasper Lyle went on his way unblushingly, and pleased himself in everything. He knew that Evelyn could not strike at him without hurting Agnes, and that she would bear anything sooner than see her turned out of Mount Eden. His wife was his strong weapon, and, since he had missed marrying Evelyn, he blessed his stars for having guided him to her. He could hardly have extracted more pleasure from Mount Eden if the estate had been literally his own, and he would (as he told himself) have had a deuced deal more trouble. The handsome salary that Evelyn paid him for his supposed services was ample to provide his wife and himself with pocket money, and, for the rest, they were provided for.

As the time went on, he became more and more indolent and presuming. He gave up even the appearance of doing work, and lounged about the property all day, with a velveteen coat on, and a cigar between his lips, whilst he numbered some men amongst his friends who were anything but desirable acquaintances for one who called himself a gentleman. His old proclivity for making companions of those beneath him in station showed itself again, and Evelyn was vexed by hearing that her steward (as Lyle was supposed to be) had been seen in the village alehouse, cohorting with her own tenantry, and even with discharged servants. She spoke to Jasper on that occasion, and rather sharply, telling him that he was going too far, and that she would not allow him to bring disgrace on her or on Mount Eden. He knew the tool to use against her, and he used it.

"All right," he answered sullenly; "I am not aware that I've done anything to call forth such a show of temper on your part, but if you don't approve of my conduct, we had better *go*."

"*Go!* Where can you go?" she exclaimed.

"Anywhere. What does it signify? Agnes has cast in her lot with mine, and she must abide by it. I'll take her to London, and we can live in a single room till I find work, and, if I don't find it, we can starve. You have not, at least, the power to prevent that."

"Oh, Will, don't speak so stupidly. You know I wouldn't allow you to do any such thing. You know that I am only too ready and willing to share everything I possess with you and my sweet Agnes. You *shall not* take her away from me until you can do so with comfort to herself. Only, be more careful. These stories reach me from all sides, and they are not creditable. I don't like to hear of my cousin—I mean my steward—being seen in the village alehouse. You must keep up appearances for Mount Eden's sake."

"I suppose it is that fellow Philip who retails these lies about me?" returned Lyle gloomily. "I know he hates me, and would be pleased to do me an injury. I think he'd better look to himself—a double-dealing, foul-mouthed cad."

Evelyn flew at him like a fury. No remembrance of the old love rose to soften her speech then. Indeed, the old love was so thoroughly dead and buried by that time, that it is doubtful if the recollection would have not incensed her more.

"Do not presume to speak in such terms of Captain Philip to me," she exclaimed. "He is an upright and honorable gentleman, above suspicion in every possible way, and you should consider it an honor to be permitted to work under him. If you abuse and insult him, you will lose my favor for ever. Understand me plainly, Mr. Lyle, Captain Philip is the real head of this estate, and those who cannot submit to his authority may leave it. He has never repeated any tales of you to me. He is too generous to try and injure his fellow-creatures. They have been told me by my servants, more accidentally than with *malice prepense*, but you should never have given cause for the repetition."

Jasper Lyle shrugged his shoulders.

"I really think I had better adhere to my proposition, and take my wife away from Mount Eden. I had no idea that Captain Philip's name would raise such a storm of opposition on your part, or that he was king of the estate. Perhaps you have some intention of making him so in right earnest. In that case, let me wish you joy."

The insulting tone and words stung Evelyn to the quick. Had he been unmarried then, she would have reversed all her former concessions in his favor, and publicly denounced him as a forger and an imposter.

But he was not unmarried. Agnes' lot must for evermore be linked with his. So she turned from him with a look of irrepressible scorn, and entered the house in silence.

But Jasper Lyle cared very little about her anger. Since he had lived at Mount Eden, and seen the evident alteration in her manner towards him, the feelings of gratitude which had first possessed him had entirely evaporated, and been replaced by a great desire for retaliation and revenge. His weak, self-satisfied nature could not recognize the justice of her possessing Mount Eden. He looked upon it as an injury to himself, and one which (if possible) he should resent. And one of his low companions—a certain brewer named Mullins—had put an idea in his head a short time before, which had settled, and was fermenting there. Lyle had grown very bold in going about Mount Eden and St. Mary Ottery, and discussing the affairs of Miss Rayne, and the antecedents of the Caryll family. He was satisfied there was no further chance of his detection; he would have walked into the presence of Mr. Gamble himself without fear, and he wanted to find out exactly how the land lay concerning himself. Villagers are always ready enough to discuss the histories of the families who rule over their domain, and repeat all the rumors, scandalous or otherwise, concerning them. Consequently, Jasper Lyle was not long before he had heard the whole story of his uncle's bereavement and his own delinquency, and how that was the reason that a woman reigned at Mount Eden.

"I wonder," he said musingly, one afternoon, to his friend Mullins the brewer—"I wonder *how* the estate is left to Miss Rayne."

"Well, I can't tell you for certain, sir, but I've heard the

old gentleman was rather queer on one point, and that was the possibility of the son that was drownded turning up again. You see, he'd never seen the body, and he couldn't believe it, like, and he wouldn't have the will destroyed in which he'd left this son everything, in case he came home. So Miss Rayne holds the estate, as it were, in trust for him; but, bless you, he couldn't never come back now. He's been dead, poor chap, years and years ago."

"But Mr. Caryll had another son, or a cousin, hadn't he, that he wished to make his heir?" inquired Lyle cautiously.

"Oh, a nevy! yes, but bless you, the poor young fellow went wrong. Forged a bill, or summat, and bolted to America, and has never been heard of since. Dead like the other, most likely. I've never been to America myself, but I've heard people mostly dies there."

"It is to be hoped he is. It might be awkward for Miss Rayne if he came home again."

"I don't see that, sir. What harm could he do? You see he's a forger. The police would have him as soon as he set foot in England."

"But who holds the proofs of his forgery, Mullins?"

"Ah! I don't know that, sir. They've got them in Scotland Yard, perhaps. They wouldn't let such things be destroyed."

"I wonder," said Jasper Lyle, "if they *were* destroyed, by accident or otherwise, and the runaway nephew returned, he would have any chance of getting a share of the property?"

Nothing more was said on the subject at that moment, but a few days after, as Lyle was again enjoying the company of his friend the brewer, Mullins said suddenly to him,—

"By the way, Mr. Lyle, you was a-speculating last time as we sat here, whether that nevy of the late Mr. Caryll's, if he was to come to England, would have any chance of getting Mount Eden?"

"Provided the proofs of his crime had not been kept against him. It was mere curiosity on my part. The law is so intricate, and a man would not be likely to let a place like Mount Eden slip through his hands if there was any chance of claiming it."

"Well, sir, here's a friend of mine here as could put it all plain before you—Mr. Dickson, as is head clerk to the solicitors at St. Mary Ottery. Mr. Dickson, sir," continued

Mullins, bawling across the tap-room, "come this way and have a glass of summat with me and this gentleman, Mr. Lyle, one of the stewards of Mount Eden."

"It's really not worth troubling Mr. Dickson about," said Jasper Lyle carelessly. "It is a matter of no consequence. Merely a discussion whether, in case of there being no proofs against this runaway nephew of Mr. Caryll's, he might not come home some day and claim the estates."

"Oh, the Mount Eden scandal," replied the clerk laughing. "I don't know, I'm sure; I believe it's a moot question. It depends entirely upon the wording of the will. I *have* heard it said that the late Mr. Caryll was so certain that his nephew could never visit England, on account of the forgery, that he merely left his property to his niece as next-of-kin, and not to the entire exclusion of all other heirs. Indeed, the old gentleman believed so fully to the day of his death that his son might some day return, that Miss Rayne only holds Mount Eden contingent to that very improbable event. In which case, if a nearer relation (as of course the nephew would be) came forward to dispute her claim, I should think it would make a pretty question of law whether he would not be entitled to, at least, a part of the estate. But then, you see, this nephew was a forger, and could never show himself in a court of law, so there's an end of it. Whoever holds the forged cheques would only have to produce them to squash the whole concern."

"We were supposing the proofs to be lost, or destroyed."

"People don't destroy such things. They are sure to be in the possession of the firm."

"But for the sake of argument, Mr. Dickson, let us suppose they *are* lost, and the man came back. Could the firm convict him upon hearsay evidence only?"

"No, nor likely to take the trouble to do so. What good would they get of it?"

"They might wish to take their revenge."

"Then they'd have to produce their proofs. You can do nothing in law without proof. And the nephew would have to prove he was the nephew into the bargain."

"Surely that would be easy enough?"

"Easy, but not agreeable. Such gentlemen don't care, as a rule, to push themselves too much forward. However, if all parties were good natured, I don't say it isn't to be

done. Good afternoon, gentlemen. I must be going," and Mr. Dickson made his way back to St. Ottery.

His conversation had a strong effect upon Lyle's mind. He ruminated on it for hours before he returned to Mount Eden.

"There is one thing I *must* do," he decided, "and that is to get hold of those forged cheques. It is a shame that Evelyn should have kept them by her for so long. What could have been her motive but to keep me in her power, and have a life-long hold over me? And that is what women call *love*. Bah! It is the first step to be taken, and I shall not be easy till it is accomplished. In her nasty state of mind she might change their hiding-place, or deposit them with her solicitors, and blight all my hopes for ever."

From that day Jasper Lyle took every opportunity of examining the marquetrie cabinet, in which he had seen Evelyn place the records of his crime. It stood in her private sitting-room, but she spent many hours out of the house each day, and the window commanded the approach by which she must needs come home again. So when Anna (who was the only servant privileged to enter her mistress' room) was out of the way, Jasper pursued his research with comparative safety. But the cabinet resisted all his efforts. It was one of these old-fashioned, substantially-built pieces of furniture that have not been knocked together in a day. It consisted of two beautifully-inlaid panel doors, which locked securely over a secretary desk and nest of drawers, which closed with a different key. The lock was a Bramah. Mr. Lyle could not pick it, though he was clever at such artifices, neither could he interfere (unnoticed) with the hinges of the panel doors. His only chance was to open it with its own keys. The question was how to get at them? Evelyne Rayne was very practical, not at all the sort of woman to have her keys lying about for any one to meddle with. But he did not think she always carried them about with her either. There was too large a bunch of them for that. He ventured into the adjoining bedroom once or twice, and with one ear open for an approaching footstep, looked round carefully for a key-basket, and peeped into the little boxes on the toilet-table, and the vases on the mantelshelf without finding what he wanted. But he was not dis-

couraged. He had learned more of the ways of womankind during his ten years' expatriation than he would have cared his wife to know of, and he was up to many of their little feminine devices. And a favorite trick of the sex is (as he well knew) to hide their keys in a different place each day—sometimes under their handkerchiefs or veils, sometimes in the crown of their best bonnet, sometimes in such a careful place that they can't find then themselves when the next occasion demands it. And so Mr. Lyle commenced a regular search each morning in Evelyn's wardrobe drawers; and one day he lit upon the bunch of keys (as he had anticipated) inside the folds of a necktie. He grasped them eagerly. It was not an opportunity to be lost—it was one that might never occur again. With the keys in his hand, he entered the adjoining room, and listened from the landing. Not a sound was to be heard. The servants had finished all the upstairs work, and were busy preparing for their dinner in the servants' hall. Evelyn and Agnes had driven out together to St. Mary Ottery, and could not be home for another hour. Fate had thrown the chance straight into his lap. He returned to the sitting-room, and hastily unlocking the marquetrie cabinet began to search each drawer in turn. They were all locked, but the two keys were together, and easily distinguished from the rest. In his agitation during their first interview, he had forgotten to note in which drawer Evelyn had replaced the forged cheques; but he soon found them sealed up in an envelope, and endorsed with his uncle's signature. They lay in company with his photographs, and letters, and the soiled gloves and battered fusee-case before alluded to.

"I wonder if I had better take them all," he thought to himself; "that fellow Dickson said the claimant might have some trouble to prove his identity, but I don't see how these articles would help me. No one but a woman would keep such rubbish, but if Eve opened the drawer by chance, its complete emptiness would at once betray me. No; I will only take these beastly cheques and the photographs. Thank goodness, I have been successful at last, and that worry, at least, is off my mind."

He hastily tore open the envelope to make sure he had got hold of the right papers, and then, thrusting them and the photographs into his coat pocket, he locked the drawers

and the cabinet, and replaced the bunch of keys where he had found them—between the folds of the necktie. He examined the two rooms carefully before he left them, to see that every article of furniture was in its accustomed place, and then, with a sigh of relief, he carried his stolen goods to his own chamber. It was a sumptuous apartment that Evelyn had given over for the use of Mr. and Mrs. Lyle. The bed and window hangings were of rich damask, and the floor was carpeted with velvet pile. In the deep bay window stood a couch and a writing table, laden with every convenience for Agnes' private correspondence. The wax taper and the box of vestas were conveniently near each other. Jasper lighted the candle, and deliberately burned the forged cheques to tinder. As the last spark died out of them, and they lay in black nothingness before him, he laughed aloud.

"There's one link of my fetters broken," he said, as he blew the ashes out of the window; "I don't think any one will be able to bring up the forged cheques against Will Caryll now. And if Eve finds out her loss before the time is ripe, and accuses me of it, why, I shall defy her—that is all—*coûte que coûte.*"

He had hardly re-arranged the writing-table and changed his coat, and walked out into the grounds, before he encountered the carriage returning from St. Mary Ottery with the ladies.

"Oh, Jasper, dear," exclaimed Agnes, "how I wish you had been with us. It is the most heavenly day, and I saw exactly the sort of flannel coat you want for the morning, only I didn't like to buy it without your sanction. Blue and white stripes—so pretty. And they have ties and socks to match. Where have you been, Jasper? In the house?"

"*In the house?*" repeated Mr. Lyle, with magnificent scorn. "I have been miles away, looking after my business."

"Indeed," remarked Evelyn; "I didn't know we had any business to be done to day-miles away."

"You're too hard on me, Miss Rayne. You make me no excuse for a *façon de parler.* I should have said simply that I've spent my morning in the Three Bottom Acre, superintending the carrying of the corn. They've got it all in by this time, I expect."

"Yes, they have," replied Evelyn coolly. "We have been watching them for the last hour."

Lyle bit his lip and turned away.

"But where were you, darling?" asked Agnes innocently. "*We* never saw him, did we, Evelyn?"

"No, Agnes, we did not. But let us move on now, for I want my luncheon."

And she started her ponies so unceremoniously, that Jasper Lyle had to jump out of the way, with an oath, to avoid the wheel passing over his feet. This episode made him too sulky, or too shy to join them at luncheon, so he strolled down to his favorite public-house, and ordered what he required there instead, and then made a pretence of superintending the harvest until five o'clock, when he returned home to prepare himself for the dinner-table.

As he entered his dressing-room, he glanced into the adjoining bed-chamber with the expectation of seeing his wife ready to go downstairs, intead of which she was sitting on the sofa in a loose wrapper, with red eyes and stained cheeks, and her gaze eagerly directed towards the door.

"Why, whatever's the matter?" he exclaimed, as he advanced towards her.

"Oh, Jasper, I have been longing for you to come back. I am in such distress. I don't know what to do."

And here Mrs. Lyle began to weep afresh.

"Look, look," she continued, as she held out her hand to him, "what is the meaning of this? Who wrote it? Where did you know her? Can it be really true that you gave them to her?"

"I don't know what the d—l you're talking about," said Jasper irritably, as she sobbed out her string of questions; "be more explicit, or I cannot answer you."

"These—*these*," replied Agnes, holding out her hand again, and then he perceived it held the photographs he had taken from the marquetrie cabinet. He had left them in his pocket when he had changed his coat, and Agnes had been exercising her marital right to put away his things. He swore under his breath as he took them from her, but it was too late to prevent mischief. On the back of one was written, in his hand, "*To Cousin Evelyn, from Cousin Will;*" on the back of the other, in Evelyn's, "*From my own darling Will*," with an appended date. As Jasper

looked at the inscriptions, and remembered that Agnes had heard the story of her early attachment from Evelyn's own lips, his color came and went, and he realized that he must either brave the matter out by lying, or make his wife his confidant.

"Speak to me," exclaimed Agnes hysterically; "tell me the meaning of it, for God's sake. That is the same photograph you showed me at Featherstone Hall, and threw in the fire sooner than I should keep. Is it possible you are *not* Jasper Lyle—that you have deceived me—that you are Evelyn's Cousin Will? Speak, or I shall go mad."

She was so fearfully agitated, that he was afraid to deceive her further. And after all, he thought, she was his wife, their interests were the same, and it would be wiser to take her into his confidence. But first he must do a little bit of love-making, at which, when he chose, Mr. William Caryll Jasper Lyle was particularly happy. So he went and sat down on the couch, and threw his arms about Agnes, and kissed her warmly.

"I will tell you everything," he whispered, "if you won't cry. And first, you must know how I *love* you, Agnes."

"Oh, yes, oh, yes," she said, nestling to him; "and that nothing can loosen the close tie between us."

"You are my wife, Agnes,—my very self,—and I will keep nothing from you. My name is *not* Jasper Lyle. It is William Caryll, and I *am* Evelyn Rayne's cousin."

She lifted her big blue eyes, wide opened, to his face. Her mouth had fallen apart like that of a frightened child. Her breath came in short gasps from her laboring breast.

"*William Caryll*," she repeated at length. "Oh, Jasper, and—*she loved you!*"

Then the poor child broke down again, as the remembrance of Evelyn's words in speaking of that love, mingled with the thought that they were living under the same roof, overwhelmed her with a terrible dread of—she knew not what.

"Hush, Agnes, my darling. If you make your distress patent to the household, and this news gets about, you will lose me altogether. I will go back to America to-night, and you shall never see me again. Be patient, and you shall know everything, and confess I am not so much to blame."

"But she *loved* you," moaned Agnes.

"Years and years ago, but what of that? You can see very plainly that Miss Evelyn doesn't love me to-day. Why, she is positively rude sometimes. It was a boy and girl attachment, which never would have come to anything. We were too young even to know what love meant. It was all rubbish, and forgotten long ago."

"Evelyn hadn't forgotten it. She told me (before she saw you) that all she was waiting for before she died was to see her Cousin Will again, that she was *sure* that he would come back to her, and that when he did, whether he was rich or poor, sick or well, he would find her as she had ever been—his true and faithful friend. Oh, is it *possible* that you can be *him?*"

"It *is* possible, my dear. It is the fact. But you mustn't think any more of anything Eve may have said about me. It was all talk. You see I did come back, and she doesn't love me—in fact, I think she has grown rather to dislike me now than otherwise."

"Oh, no; she is always kind and good. See how she lets us live with her at Mount Eden. Jasper, does she *know* you are her cousin? When did she find it out?"

"Directly she saw me, you little goose. Don't you remember her leaving the Hall the first evening we met there? And then I paid her a visit at Mount Eden, and we had it out; and she promised to respect my *incognito*, and keep my secret. But something has happened lately, Agnes, which is likely to make me throw off my disguise, and then I should have been obliged to tell you everything."

"Oh, tell it me now—I am so anxious to hear it," said his wife. "It is incomprehensible to me. Why did you drop your real name, and pretend you had never known Evelyn before? I should have thought the first place you would have rushed to would have been Mount Eden, to see such a darling cousin, and tell her you were alive and well. How could you pretend you had never even heard her name?"

"Agnes, my dear, that is a very long story, that cannot be told in a minute, and the first dinner bell has rung. Dress yourself now and come downstairs, and you shall hear everything this evening, I promise you."

"Oh, Jasper, as if I *could* go down to dinner with this dreadful news half told. Why, I am shaking all over with anxiety and fear. How could I look my darling Evelyn in

the face? Her Cousin Will *my husband!* I cannot believe it. It is too awful to be true."

"And would you have me *hers*, then, instead? Don't you love me, Agnes?" asked Lyle, in his tenderest voice.

"Oh, Jasper, you know I do, and I could not give you up to any woman—not even *her*."

"Nor would she take me as a gift, Agnes. She has got all over that long ago. Now, lie down on the sofa, my darling, and I will send you up your dinner, and join you as soon as ever I can afterwards; and then, Agnes, *you shall know all.*"

"Don't let Evelyn come to me," cried Agnes, hiding her face. "Not yet, I could not bear it."

"No one shall come but myself. *I* will bring up your dinner. And remember, Agnes, this is a profound secret, and you must not breathe a word of what I have told you to any one."

"Not even to Evelyn?"

"Not till I give you leave. You promise me, Agnes?"

"*I promise you*," she said, as she hid her face from view again.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE RIGHTFUL HEIR.

JASPER LYLE had a motive for deferring the relation of his adventures till after dinner. He wanted time to decide how much of them he had better tell, and how much leave untold. He didn't want to startle Agnes too much at first, and forgery is an ugly word. If he made her shrink from him, she would fly to Evelyn for consolation, and it was his object to detach her as much as possible from her early friend. There was no doubt that war was brewing in the distance between his cousin and himself, and his wife must be on his side. And if he was ever to bring forward a claim to Mount Eden, it must be by a daring and complete denial of having committed the forgery, and by defying his opponents to produce any proofs of it. Therefore, the only plan was to commence from that moment, and present himself to Agnes as a martyr instead

of a criminal. He was thinking so deeply all dinner time that he was very silent, and Evelyn was glad when the meal was concluded. She had proposed to go up to Agnes directly she heard she was not well enough to come downstairs, but Jasper had declined the offer. His wife was a little overtired and hysterical, he said, and particularly wished to see no one but himself. And he had taken the dinner tray from the servant's hands, and carried it up to the bedroom, whilst Evelyn sat still at the table, with feelings of mortified pride and resentment. How different it had been a short time ago. *Then* she would have been the first person whom Agnes would have asked for in trouble or sickness. But everything in her life seemed changed, and she realized (as so many have done before her) that where a husband's authority steps in (however new and untried it may be), all other affections and interests have to take a back seat. Mr. Lyle returned to the dinner-table, but it was only to ask his hostess to excuse him for the remainder of the meal, and she was too glad to let him go. His company was at all times more pain than pleasure to her.

He sauntered back into his wife's room as if he had been a hero about to relate the story of his victories, rather than a criminal to confess his crime. He had gained a lot of effrontery since he had lived at Mount Eden, and the destruction of the forged cheques had made him stand two inches taller. He felt so safe that he had begun to believe he was an injured man, and would experience no difficulty in saying so. He was not so handsome at this period as he had promised to be. Doubtless the change in the color of his hair had something to do with it. The fair curls with which he had started in life had accorded well with his blue eyes and delicate complexion. It will generally be found a dangerous experiment, with regard to beauty, to alter the natural coloring matter of the hair. But it may be remembered that when Evelyn Rayne, actuated by love, contrived so cleverly for her cousin's escape from Liverpool, she dyed his hair brown, and Will Caryll had continued the practice, from a sense of prudence, until his locks were nearly black. This unnatural combination made his face look very pale, and his eyes washed out, and strangers seldom found the charms in him that Agnes did. They pronounced him "foreign," and "queer-looking," and

considered he was unhealthy. But he had a finely-developed, tall, and upright figure, as indeed all the Carylls had, and his little wife thought him perfection. She was still gazing at his photographs as he re-entered her room.

"Jasper, if you hadn't told me it was so, I *never* should have imagined these portraits were taken of you. How you must have altered since you were a boy."

"I have altered in more ways than one, Agnes. I was a happy, hopeful youth when I sat for these photographs, and now I am a broken down and disappointed man—more than that, darling, a most wronged and injured man."

"Oh, my dearest," cried the girl, clasping her arms about him, "*who* is it that has wronged you? I have always felt you were unhappy, Jasper. It was my great wish to comfort you that first drew me to you. But I thought it might be perhaps because you had lost all your friends, and had no companionship to cheer you. But *injury*, darling! I never dreamt of that."

"And I would not have told you of it, Agnes, even now, excepting that, for the first time, there seems a glimmer of hope that my wrongs may be redressed. You see how poor I am, my darling. Even the miserable pittance I married you on has slipped out of my hands, and I am compelled to work almost like a laborer in order to provide you with a home. You consider it very generous of my Cousin Evelyn to let us live at Mount Eden, Agnes—"

"Oh, so it is, Jasper. What should we have done without her help? Poor mamma could not assist us. I believe we should have starved."

"I know those are your sentiments, and it is because I have been so loath to destroy them, and to hurt your feelings, that I have not set you right before. What would you say, Agnes, if I told you that, instead of being pensioners on Evelyn Rayne's bounty, she should be living upon ours—that *I* am the rightful owner of Mount Eden, and my cousin is only an usurper?"

Agnes didn't know *what* to say. She stared at her husband for a minute, as if she thought he had gone mad, and then she grew deadly pale, and murmured —

"It *cannot* be true!"

"It *is* true," replied Jasper fiercely—"true as there is a God in heaven. You and I are the rightful possessors of

this estate, Agnes, and before long I will prove to the world that it is so."

"But *Evelyn!*" gasped his wife. "Oh, Jasper, you frighten me. Think of Evelyn. She cannot know it. She would be the last person in the world to do any one an injury. Mr. Caryll left Mount Eden to her. I know he did. How could she hold it else? And since he did so, how can you or I, or anybody, take it from her? You must be dreaming. Evelyn is the only mistress of Mount Eden."

"Oh, very well," said Jasper, in an offended tone; "if you know better than I do, we will drop the conversation. Only, you might have waited till you had heard your husband's side of the story."

"Jasper, I *am* waiting to hear it. You must tell me everything now, from the very beginning," replied Agnes, slightly shivering, as she nestled in his arms.

"It's a sad story, Agnes. I must prepare you for that. I was a thoughtless and disobedient boy (I admit so far), but I was not the criminal they tried to make me out to be. And if, whilst I am telling it to you, I appear to throw any blame upon your bosom friend, Evelyn Rayne, you must remember that you have only seen one side (and the best side) of her character, whilst I have had to suffer for her faults. She may well seem sunny, and bright, and good-tempered, when she has gained the desire of her heart in Mount Eden."

"Jasper, tell me the story quickly. I feel as if I could not bear the suspense."

"Well, it it just like this. My uncle, Roger Caryll, was a rich Liverpool merchant. His wife and son were dead, and he had only two near relatives, Eve and myself. I was the son of his brother, Edward, and she was the daughter of his sister, Mary, but uncle never took any notice of Eve—he had never even seen her, I believe. She lived with her aunt, Miss Rayne, in a dirty little house in Liverpool, and I lodged with them. Uncle Roger put me there. I was his acknowledged heir. As soon as he heard my Cousin Hugh was drowned, he fetched me himself from London, where I was serving behind a counter (because my mother, who had married again after my father's death, behaved very cruelly to me), and put me in his son's place in his office. That was about the time that photograph

was taken, Agnes. I was as smart a young fellow as there was in Liverpool,—always well-dressed and well-looking,—and there were never any complaints of my want of morals or industry. And that was the time, too, that Eve took her unfortunate liking for me."

"*Eve took a liking for you!*" repeated Agnes; "didn't *you* like *her*, Jasper?"

"Yes, I *liked* her, of course. She was my cousin, and was always running about after me, and paying me compliments. Nobody is quite proof against such things, you know, Agnes, and most young men are conceited. But Eve mistook my feelings for her. She was very much in love with me,—I suppose I needn't mind telling *you* that, my darling,—and she was always worrying me to take her out to theatres, and concerts, and places of amusement, and I was thoughtless, and in order to gratify her, I spent more money than I could afford. I don't wish to make myself out better than I was, you see, Agnes."

"I know you don't," she returned, squeezing him to her bosom; "and as for poor Evelyn, how could she help loving you? I'm sure *I* can't."

"Ah, you're my silly little wife," said Lyle, accepting the homage laid at his feet as if it were entirely his due; "but I'm afraid, as I go on, you will have to acknowledge, Agnes, that Evelyn has not so strong a claim to your admiration as heretofore. This is the painful part of my task, dearest, to be obliged to say anything derogatory to her, because I know how you have loved her; but I will finish my story, and you must judge for yourself. I was then the acknowledged heir to my uncle's fortune and estate. Every one knew it. Uncle Roger made no secret of it, and always treated me as his son. But the old gentleman was very stingy, and when he found I had outrun the constable, he cut off my allowance, and left me without a farthing. Of course I wanted money for Eve, and other things, and a fellow-clerk of mine suggested we should raise some. I was a young fool, and didn't know anything about such things, so left it all to him. He raised—as he called it—a hundred pounds, and lent fifty to me, with which to pay a tailor's bill. One day there was a row in the office, and I was questioned about getting the money, and told the truth, but uncle wouldn't believe me, and then I found that the other fellow had been forging—actually

forging uncle's name to a cheque, and declaring I was his accomplice, though I needn't tell you I would have had nothing to do with such a dirty trick. But I was so frightened at the accusation, that I ran home to tell Eve, and consult with her what I had best do to prove my innocence, and here the unhappy part of the story comes in, Agnes."

"Why! didn't Evelyn help you? She, who is always so ready to help others."

"Well, she posted off to see Uncle Roger (whom she had never met before, mind you), and what passed between them heaven only knows; but it changed the whole current of my life. She came back only to tell me that my uncle was resolved to prosecute me with the other fellow, though I was as innocent as the babe unborn, and that my only safety lay in flight. She dyed my hair brown (perhaps you will be surprised to hear that, naturally, my hair is almost as golden as your own, Agnes), and dressed me in a suit of girl's clothes, and persuaded me to go to New York on board an emigrant ship. And I was so frightened, and she gave me so little time for reflection, that I actually did as she advised me. And then, when I had left England beyond recall, she made up to the old gentleman to such an extent that he brought her to live here with him, and left her all he had. Doubtless she persuaded him that I was dead or guilty, and trusted to my never turning up again. But (failing my Cousin Hugh) I was my uncle's next male heir, and Evelyn Rayne is usurping my legal right to-day by calling herself mistress of Mount Eden. And that's your unfortunate husband's story, Agnes."

Mrs. Lyle was not clever, but she was not quite a fool, and the narrative (although glibly repeated) appeared to her to have more than one flaw in it.

"But why, Jasper," she asked timidly—"why did you suffer such a horrible wrong? Why didn't you tell your uncle at once that you had had nothing to do with the forgery? Surely the police could have found out who presented the cheque?"

Jasper Lyle did not appear to be at all proud of his wife's sagacity.

"You're a fool," he said curtly. "All women *are* where business matters are concerned. What would have

been the use of my denying my complicity when I had received fifty pounds of the money? But Eve could have put it straight with the old man if she had chosen; but she did not choose. She preferred to have me sent out of the way, and the only obstacle removed from her path. She may be very sweet to you, and all that, but she's an arch plotter, or she wouldn't be in her present position."

"Still, if Mr. Caryll *did* leave Mount Eden to her, it is hers," persisted Agnes.

"I'm not so sure of that, my dear, nor are the lawyers either. The estate was left to Eve as next-of-kin, supposing *me* to be dead, or outlawed. But I'm not dead, you see; and I can defy them to prove I was guilty; and, therefore, if I take this case into court, I stand a very good chance of regaining a part, if not all, of my legal rights."

"But you would never go to law against *Evelyn?*" cried Agnes, horrified.

"And why not, my darling? Which do you suppose I love best—Evelyn or you? For whose rights should I fight? Evelyn's or yours? *You* are the real mistress of Mount Eden. Why shouldn't I put you in your proper place?"

But Agnes had burst into a flood of tears.

"Oh, Jasper," she sobbed, "I don't want it. I should be miserable. I should be always thinking of Evelyn, and that I had turned her out of her home. I couldn't do it. We are very happy as we are. Why can't everything go on the same?"

"It's very evident that you love Eve better than you do me," said her husband, with an offended air.

"No, dearest, no. Don't say that. I love you more than all the world put together. But Evelyn has been my friend so long—ever since I was a tiny child, and it seems terrible that *I* should be the one to deprive her of Mount Eden."

"You will have nothing to do with it, Agnes. All the blame (if there *is* any blame) will rest on me. But I am a man, and I cannot stand tamely by and see myself defrauded of my inheritance. This position of dependence is one of agony to me, especially when I remember that my cousin only put me in it probably as a salve to her conscience. Why, she gives that fellow Philip double the salary she does me."

"But he does twice the work," remonstrated Agnes.

"That's nothing to the purpose," rejoined Jasper testily. "The whole of the money should be mine, and I won't put up with a part. And there are other reasons why you should be glad to think that this state of things will not go on for ever, Agnes."

"What other reasons?" she demanded innocently.

"Well, they're rather difficult to specify, and a man gets credit for being conceited if he even alludes to them; but it is impossible to keep one's eyes *quite* shut, Agnes, and it isn't every wife who would care to see her husband thrown into daily and hourly contact with a woman who is very much in love with him."

Mrs. Lyle grew as red as a rose.

"But that happened so long ago, Jasper. Surely Evelyn must have got over it by this time?"

"Did it appear to you as if she *had* got over it when she told you the story of her early attachment in this very house? What have you repeated to me on the subject yourself this evening?"

Agnes was silent, though her bosom heaved violently, and her color came and went in sudden rushes. Jasper had hit the right nail on the head this time, and touched the spring that would make his wife see all things through the medium of his interpretation.

"But—but," she said, with dry lips—"Evelyn would never do *me* such a wrong as to show anything more than an ordinary interest in my husband."

"I am afraid you don't quite know Evelyn yet, my dear. She is not likely to evince her feelings in your presence, naturally,—no woman would be quite so simple as that,—but there are a hundred and one ways by which she makes me understand that the past is not forgotten or forgiven. I suppose she expected me to come home and marry her; as if I *could* when *you* stood in the way. But if you had seen what took place between us when I visited Mount Eden, and discovered my identity to her, you would have been horrified. She was like a fury. She declared I should never marry you, and that, if I attempted it, she would denounce me as an imposter and a forger, and have me turned out of Featherstone Hall. But I was firm in resisting her entreaties, and laughing at her threats, and what was the result? All her grand intentions ended

in smoke; and, as soon as we were married, she was glad enough to get us to come and live at Mount Eden, where she could see me every day But I'm pretty well tired of it."

"And I am more than tired," exclaimed his wife angrily. "I am disgusted and shocked to hear of such wickedness, and I will not stay here another day. Let me pack up my things, Jasper, and take me from this horrid place at once. Oh, I never *could* have believed that Evelyn would be false to me!"

But this was swinging the pendulum a little too far in the opposite direction. To leave Mount Eden without any warning would be not only inconvenient, but impossible, and Mr. Lyle had to resort once more to endearments to enforce his arguments.

"Now, my darling," he exclaimed, "you must be patient, and look at the matter in a sensible light. I cannot take you away from Mount Eden directly. I never mean to take you away at all. It is because I have no money, my dearest, with which to gratify all your little whims and wishes, that I am thirsting to claim my rights, and place you in the position you are entitled to as my wife. If we offend Eve before my plans are ripe, we may never be able to carry them out, for I am afraid she is capable of being very revengeful where her inclinations are thwarted. So my angel must make up her mind to let things go on just as they have done for a few weeks longer, and then she shall do exactly as she likes."

"But to live in the same house with her, and to think, whenever we are separate, that she may be making love to you—oh, it will be too horrible!" said Agnes.

"Stop, dear," interposed Jasper. "I never told you that my cousin made love to me *now*. Do you imagine I would allow it? Evelyn knows me too well. I have satisfied her too fully of my allegiance to my little wife for her to attempt to interfere with it."

"But if she would *like* to do so, it comes to the same thing," replied Agnes fretfully. "You men are so frightfully weak with regard to women, one can never tell when you will give in. I know I shall never have another happy moment whilst I am at Mount Eden."

"Well, as to whether my cousin would *like* to renew our former intercourse, I really cannot say," replied Lyle

conceitedly, "but I am quite sure she will never have the chance. I don't care for your big, strapping women, and never did. Besides, I have not forgiven her the trick she played in carting me off to America, and it will be a long time before I do. If I show her any forbearance when I have established my claim to the property, it will be out of respect to my uncle's memory and not for her own sake. I can tell you that."

Agnes did not plead for her early friend this time. Nothing changes the current of a woman's feelings towards one of her own sex so effectually, as the knowledge that she has tried to come between her and the man she loves. For the first time in her life, Agnes Lyle felt hard and cold when she thought of Evelyn Rayne.

"Jasper," she said presently, in a weary little voice, as if all the surprise and pain she had gone through had tired her, "why did you change your name?"

"For the same reason that I went abroad—because Evelyn persuaded me that I stood in danger of the law."

"But when you saw the mistake you had made,—when you met me,—why didn't you marry me under your own name?"

"It was too late then, Agnes. To have resumed the name of William Caryll would have excited so much curiosity that I could not have satisfied. Besides, I was not aware of the position in which I stood with regard to Mount Eden. I did not know I had any legal claim to the property."

"And how do you know now?"

"I have consulted a lawyer on the subject, and—and —I have ascertained also that the forged cheques which the clerk I told you of uttered have been destroyed, so that it is quite impossible that my cousin can put a spoke in my wheel by bringing of that old shoulder against me."

"Then you will call yourself by your own name now, surely?"

"Very soon I shall, dear. And till that time, I must beg of you, Agnes, to be completely silent on this subject. Not a word or a hint, mind, to Evelyn or any one. We must work in the dark awhile before we can bring everything to the light. And I hope you will not let what I have told you make any difference in your behavior towards my cousin, or I shall be sorry that I confided in you. Let

everything go on the same whilst I carry out my plans, and some day you will see yourself the mistress of Mount Eden."

"I will try," said Agnes, in a low voice.

"And now, my darling, will you go to bed? You look very weary, and I want to go out and have my cigar—and Eve will be thinking it strange if I remain away from her much longer."

"She will be trying to make love to you again," said Agnes, in a tone of injury, as she buried her face in the sofa cushion.

"But she will fail," answered her husband gaily, as he kissed her and left the room.

"But though she was wounded, and jealous, and unhappy, the last words the poor girl kept repeating before she cried herself to sleep, were, "Oh, Evelyn, Evelyn. I never thought Evelyn could be untrue to me. However am I to meet her again?"

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE STOLEN PROOFS.

But though Jasper Lyle made every excuse for his wife on the score of ill-health and fatigue, and though Agnes herself tried hard to behave in all things as she had done before, it was impossible, as the days went on, that Evelyn Rayne should not distinguish a visible alteration in her little friend's manner towards her. Had she not known Agnes all her life? You might as well expect a tender mother not to perceive when her child's kiss becomes less frequent and less fond, or when her confidence is withdrawn from her, and stilted questions and answers take the place of free and spontaneous intercourse. There were moments, indeed, when Agnes was herself again, when she forgot everything except that Evelyn had never been otherwise than good and true to her. But then the remembrance of Jasper's story would intervene to cloud her brow and check her flow of words. It was impossible that such a story should not exert a powerful influence over his wife's mind. He had blended truth and falsehood together so

cunningly, that Evelyn herself would have been astonished to hear his version of the past, and puzzled to say which facts he had perverted, and which related as they had occurred. And to Agnes—who still loved him and believed in him—it had naturally made him appear as a victim of circumstances who called for her deepest commiseration and sympathy. The idea of turning Evelyn from her home had been a terrible one to her until she heard that Evelyn had poached on her preserves, and tried to alienate her husband's affections from her. That is a crime that no woman will forgive—even in her best and dearest friend. And so it came to pass that these two—who had been all the world to one another, until Jasper Lyle stepped in between them—drifted imperceptibly but surely apart, until they hardly exchanged anything but the merest commonplaces. To Evelyn, this change came as a very bitter trouble. Agnes had been her idol, and to see her turn from her to the company of others, or seek refuge in silence when they were thrown together, made her heart ache with pain. She guessed that it was due to Jasper Lyle's influence, but that made it all the harder to bear, as under no circumstances would she have dreamt of interfering between a husband and his wife. She tried to overcome it at first by increased caresses and sundry little votive offerings. But when she found that Agnes stirred uneasily when she kissed her, and left her presents lying about the drawing-room, she dropped all further attempts to alter the existing state of affairs. Evelyn Rayne was a very proud woman in the best sense of the word. She was not too proud to do the meanest office on earth in exchange for a kind smile or a grateful word, but she was far too proud to lay herself down as a door-mat for people to wipe their feet upon. She would not stoop to ask Agnes (who had never kept anything from her before) for the reason of her coldness. She knew it was undeserved, as far as she was concerned, and she trusted to time to make her friend see the truth for herself. But meanwhile, her heart was very heavy, and the color seemed to have faded from her life.

Captain Philip knew she was in trouble. Often when he was talking to her of reaping, or carrying, or stacking, he could see that her thoughts were far away; and sometimes such a heavy sigh would burst from her bosom, as he had seldom heard her give vent to before. Had he cared

for her less, he might have spoken to her on the subject, but his great love made him timid, and he did not dare to mention it, far less to express the deep sympathy which he felt. But he showed it, nevertheless, by becoming absent-minded as well as herself, and being obliged to bring back his thoughts, with a jerk, to the matter in hand.

"You have never spoken to me, Captain Philip," she said one day, abruptly, "of Mr. Lyle. What do you think of him from a business point of view? Is he perfectly satisfactory? Does he carry out your orders efficiently?"

"I wish you wouldn't ask me, Miss Rayne. I know that Mr. Lyle is a friend of yours, and you place me in a very unpleasant position."

"But I consider it necessary that I should know. I wish to befriend Mr. Lyle and his wife, but not to the detriment of Mount Eden. You must be aware of that. Please tell me plainly if Mr. Lyle is injuring my property, —by neglect or otherwise,—because a great many complaints have reached me concerning him."

"If you compel me to speak, Miss Rayne, I am afraid you will find that I corroborate most of the complaints. I not only find Mr. Lyle very unsatisfactory from a business point of view (in fact, worse than useless), but I consider him to be a dangerous factor on the estate. His indolence sets a bad example to his inferiors, and his conversation is likely to end by inciting them to discontent and rebellion."

"Does he associate, then, on terms of equality with my tenants and laborers?"

"Very nearly so. He is constantly to be seen in the tap-room of the 'Green Man,' hob-nobbing with such men as Mullins and Barker—neither of them bearing too good a character in their own class."

"I must put a stop to it. It is going too far," said Evelyn, with knitted brows.

"There is another thing, Miss Rayne, that I hardly know if I have a right to mention to you, and yet I feel I should not be acting as your friend, or rather, I should say, as your faithful servant—"

Evelyn turned her eyes upon him.

'Why should you try to amend that sentence, Captain Philip? You *are* my friend. I am well aware of it. Sometimes I think," she added sadly, "you are the only friend I have."

He colored like a boy. Captain Philip (notwithstanding his thirty years) had not lost a habit of blushing that was very becoming to him.

"If I only thought—" he commenced, and there stopped short.

"Well?" said Evelyn, softly.

"Oh, Miss Rayne, your kindness puts everything I was going to say out of my head. I so much fear that you may think me presumptuous—that—that—Only believe that I shall be too much honored by being your friend, and your faithful servant both, to my life's end."

Neither of them spoke for a minute after that, and then Evelyn said,—

"And what is this information which you are dubious about the propriety of repeating to me, Captain Philip?"

"It seems too far-fetched and absurd, Miss Rayne—too much like the outcome of a drunken jest. And yet it has gained credence amongst your people, and they declare it emanated from Mr. Lyle."

"But what is it?" she asked impatiently.

"A foolish report that you have not an entirely legal hold on Mount Eden, and that before long a claimant will start up to dispute the property with you. It is too ridiculous an idea even to be contradicted, but if it is one of Mr. Lyle's jokes, the sooner he stops them the better, for you know what the ignorant classes are—ready to believe anything to the detriment or discomfiture of their superiors."

"Mr. Lyle has *dared* to say that," murmured Evelyn, with clenched teeth.

"I honestly believe it commenced with him. When it reached my ears, I made strict inquiries for its origin, and everybody attributed it to the same source—Mr. Lyle's drunken friend, Mullins the brewer. Of course you know how such stories grow by repetition. Still, there was never a hint of such a scandal before Mr. Lyle appeared amongst us."

"Thanks, Captain Philip, thanks. Please say no more. It shall be stopped, and at once."

"It is such a silly fabrication," said the overseer; "it bears absurdity upon the face of it. For there is no one who *could* dispute your claim, is there?"

"No one, except my Cousin Hugh. Oh, Captain Philip,

you can't think how much I wish sometimes that he had never died. It is a cruel kindness to leave so much responsibility on the shoulders of a woman. The back is not fitted for the burden."

"Yours has proved itself to be eminently fitted, Miss Rayne. You mustn't lose heart because an ungrateful fool does not know how to value your kindness to him."

"But this involves more than you think for, Captain Philip. It is a case on which I should have sound advice —and yet—it is so hard to know what to do for the best."

"If I can help you—" he began, but she shook her head.

"No one can help me just now. But if I find that I cannot manage matters by myself, I promise that I will apply to no friend before you."

"I thank you so much," he answered, in a low voice, and then Evelyn left him to return to the big house.

She was burning with indignation at what she had heard, and determined to let Will Caryll plainly understand the only conditions on which he could retain his position at Mount Eden. To spread such a scandal about her, and sow disaffection and distrust amongst her tenantry! What could he be thinking of? Had he suddenly gone mad? To depose *her* could not reinstate *himself* whilst she retained the forged cheques to hold over his head. It was all a puzzle to her. She could make neither head nor tail of it. But she was resolved to come to an explanation with her cousin at the earliest opportunity. When dinner was ended, and she found herself in the drawing-room with Agnes and her husband, it seemed a favorable time. They had sat through an uncomfortable meal, none of them appearing to have much to say to the other, and it was a relief to Evelyn to be able to take up her needlework, and feel that she was free to talk.

"Mr. Lyle," she commenced gravely, "I must ask you to listen to me for a few minutes. I understand you are still in the habit of spending your afternoons at the 'Green Man,' and that it deteriorates (as it inevitably must do) from your dignity as my steward. I must beg you to discontinue the custom. It is not the first time (as you know) that I have been obliged to speak to you on the subject."

Jasper Lyle's manner to the mistress of Mount Eden had become far more jaunty and familiar of late, and now there

seemed a ring of actual insolence in the tone in which he replied,—

"I was really not aware that your benefits to me included the supervision of my morals."

Evelyn looked straight at him, but her gaze had no power to make him avert his eyes.

"I have, at least, the right, as your employer," she said, "to see that you do not lower the tone of my estate. No gentleman working under me before has ever condescended to cross the threshold of a low public-house like the 'Green Man,' nor to associate with the boors and drunkards who find their pleasure there, and you must be good enough to follow their example."

"Which, being translated, means that I am to tread in the footsteps of your model overseer, Captain Philip, and to regulate all my actions by his. But I am a gentleman, and I decline to be ordered about by my inferior."

"Whether you are more or less of a gentleman than Captain Philip," replied Evelyn haughtily, "is, I should imagine, quite an open question; but I have not started this conversation with you to-night in order to decide it. I speak simply as the owner of Mount Eden. Whilst you remain with me, you must conform to my rules, and that is one of them. I hope you fully understand?"

"Oh, yes; I fully understand," replied Jasper Lyle, furtively smiling, as he played with a paper knife, whilst Agnes crept up to his side, and slipped her hand in his.

"From this unworthy habit of yours," continued Evelyn, in the same grave tone, "has sprung up a great annoyance to me. I cannot believe it emanated from yourself,—I credit you with a little more sense,—but it is attributed to you on all sides, and it doubtless had its rise in your chattering."

"And what may this be?" inquired Lyle.

"A rumor that I hold Mount Eden on an uncertain tenure, and that there are other claimants to the estate."

"Well?" he said carelessly.

"Well!" repeated Evelyn indignantly, "if you have said so, sir, you know it to be untrue. You know that I am the legal owner of the property, and that *no one* has the faintest shadow of a claim to it but myself."

"But supposing I *don't* know it? What then?"

"Do you wish to insult me? What would you insinuate?"

She spoke more cautiously than she would have done otherwise, because she had no idea that Jasper had confided the secret of his identity to his wife, and she feared to raise her curiosity.

"That you hold the estate only as next-of-kin, Miss Rayne, and that there is a nearer relative to the late Mr. Caryll still in the land of the living."

Evelyn could not believe her ears. Was it possible he could have the audacity to advance a forger's claim to the estate? But she remembered the presence of his wife, and answered calmly,—

"You are mistaken. My late uncle had only two male heirs, and they are both dead—one in reality; the other in law."

"*That* is what I have my doubts about," said Lyle.

"Then your doubts shall soon be cleared up," she answered, rising. "I will go and write to my solicitor at once to come down here to-morrow and convince you of the truth of my assertion. I will not permit such hurtful rumors to be spread about Mount Eden without being refuted. There is not a soul on earth to *dare* to dispute my right to it."

"Not even your cousin, Will Caryll?" he exclaimed impudently.

His impudence made Evelyn forget everything but itself.

"*My Cousin Will!*" she repeated. "What! *a forger?*"

But now it was Agnes' turn to exhibit her prowess, and she sprung forward in her husband's defence like a bantam hen with ruffled feathers.

"How *dare* you call him a forger?" she cried indignantly. "You know it is not true. You know it was the other fellow did it, and the blame was falsely put on Jasper. And now you would keep his estate from him, and everything. Oh! it is *too* bad."

Evelyn turned to the speaker in unmitigated surprise.

"What are you talking of, Agnes?" she said. "What can *you* know about all this? We were speaking of my cousin, Will Caryll."

"And I know that Jasper is Will Caryll," replied Agnes. "My husband has told me everything—how you made him go out to America, so that you might get Mount Eden, and how angry you were when you heard he was going to

marry me, and how you got him here, so that you might make love to him, and—"

"*Stop!*" cried Evelyn, in a voice of stern authority—"stop at once, Agnes. I refuse to listen to another word. If your husband has been base enough to give you this version of his unhappy story, you must believe him or not, as you choose. But I will not hear it repeated, and *he* knows it to be untrue."

"I know no such thing," interposed Jasper, braving it out. "If I committed forgery (as you assert), where are the proofs?"

"You *know* where they are. You have seen them."

"I know you showed me some papers, which you said were the forged cheques, but I had only your word for it."

"*Only* my word?" said Evelyn, with a look of scorn.

"Just so; which proves nothing."

"Do you wish your wife to see them, then? Do you want her to be a participator in your shame?"

"If you have them, by all means produce them. It is because I know you *cannot* have them that I desire your word to be put to the test."

"Very good, then. Agnes shall be convinced that I have spoken the truth. Come with me to my private room."

But as they were going there together, she turned and appealed to her cousin.

"Oh, Will! have pity upon her. She is so young, so innocent. I would have hidden the whole story from her for ever if I could. Think how foolish you are—how this proceeding will ruin the prospects of both of you. Be warned in time. Come back and let us talk quietly over the matter, and take up the position I have accorded you in Mount Eden."

"No, it is too late for such flummery now. You have heard what Agnes says. You told her a lot about our former history, and I have supplied the rest. Now she must judge for herself which is right and which is wrong. Lead on, please, to your sitting-room, and let us see these famous forgeries that are to ruin me for ever."

"As you will, then," she said, with a sigh, as she opened the door of her room.

It was night, but a tall silver lamp on the centre table

cast a soft light upon all the surrounding objects. Evelyn fetched her keys from the bedroom, and going up to the marquetrie cabinet, unlocked the drawer in which she had deposited the dishonored cheques. It contained only the soiled gloves and battered fusee-case. She turned the articles over several times, as though searching for something else, and then, with a look of consternation, she unlocked all the drawers in succession, and ransacked them thoroughly, whilst Will Caryll stood by with a smile upon his face.

"Well!" he ejaculated presently, "how much longer do you indend to keep us waiting? Where are these evidences of my criminality?"

"*Gone!*" she gasped. "It seems incredible, but they are gone!"

"You mean they never were there?" he sneered.

She turned upon him furiously.

"How *dare* you doubt my word, wnen you know, as well as I do, that they *were* there, and that you saw them? But I have guessed the truth. You are a thief, Will Caryll, as well as a forger, and *you have stolen them!*"

"Oh, Jasper," exclaimed Agnes, flying to his arms, "how can you let her speak to you like that? How *dare* you say he is a thief," she continued, stamping her foot with impotent rage at Evelyn; "this is your mean revenge because he didn't marry you instead of me! And I loved you so, Evelyn—I loved you so."

Here she began to sob violently, but Evelyn only showed her emotion by her trembling lips and quivering nostrils.

"And I have loved you too, Agnes, God knows!" she replied solemnly, "but you cannot hold by this man and by me at the same time. One of us you must let go. And that one must not be your husband, so I suppose that we must part. But I do not think I have deserved this treatment from either of you."

She rose as she spoke, and, locking her cabinet, prepared to leave the room. But as she moved in sad and dignified silence towards the door, a great sense broke on Agnes Lyle of all the years of love during which Evelyn had treated her like a spoiled and petted child. Who else —not even her father and mother, nor yet her husband —had been so long-suffering and patient with her—so true

and faithful—as this dear friend of her childhood? The idea of separation from her was terrible, and on the impulse of the moment she ran after her, crying.

"Oh, Evelyn, Evelyn, do not go! We cannot do without you."

But Evelyn's powers of endurance for that evening were at an end.

"Don't touch me! Don't speak to me!" she exclaimed, as she flew down the staircase, "for I feel as if I was going mad."

She rushed through the hall, and out into the open air as she spoke, whilst the sobs which she could no longer restrain burst from her laboring bosom. She had recovered from the first shock of learning Will Caryll's infidelity, and schooled herself to believe they must pass through life as acquaintances only; for the man who was not worthy to become her husband Evelyn would never make her friend. But that Agnes could turn against her, and suspect her of such unworthy motives for befriending them in their misfortune, was a trouble she had never contemplated being called upon to bear.

It was the end of September, and, though the days continued bright and warm, and the harvest moon rode like a queen in heaven, the nights were too chilly for any prudent person to venture out in them without an extra wrap. But Evelyn walked on unheedingly, whilst the wind blew her chestnut hair into disorder, and ruffled it like an aureole about her burning and excited face.

"Agnes to think me so base, so wicked, so mean," she thought, "as to offer them Mount Eden for a home as a cover for my own unworthy designs! How *could* she think so? How could Will have the heart to lead her to believe it, when he knows what she and I have been to one another? Oh, I hate him!" she cried suddenly, "*I hate him!* He must be bad all through. Wasn't it enough to spoil my life without spoiling my darling's also, and grudging us the consolation we found in one another's love? And those cheques, too. He must have stolen them. He has destroyed them, and on his success has built up a groundless hope of ousting me from Mount Eden. Can he do it, I wonder?" she went on feverishly, with both hands pressed to her burning head. "I don't believe it; and yet the law has so many loopholes. I ought to

have advice; but if Will's ideas are erroneous, and he is still in jeopardy, my confiding his design to a solicitor might bring transportation down upon his luckless head. And how terrible that would be for my poor girl, who never would have spoken to me as she did to-night if he had not instigated her to do so. How I wish I had a true and sensible friend to whom I could go, without a shadow of fear, and tell everything."

Her steps had carried her in the direction of Bachelor's Hall, and her heart told her that *here* was a friend whom she might trust, if need be, without stint, but some unaccountable feeling made her shrink from consulting him. How pretty and cosy the little cottage looked as she came in sight of it. The latticed windows were thrown wide open to the air, and the light of the lamp within threw the delicate tracery of hanging leaf, and bud, and blossom, that fell over them like veils of verdure, into strong significance. The air was redolent with the odor of late mignonette and roses, still shedding their perfume around, and carnations and geraniums, of which Captain Philip always planted a deep border to encircle his little domicile.

Evelyn looked up, and heaved a long breath as she drew near to Bachelor's Hall. For many months past, her overseer had interested her far more than she had acknowledged to herself, though she had been conscious of a feeling of fear lest he should become more necessary to her than was convenient. For he might leave her any day (she had argued), and then, how difficult she should find it to replace him.

She did not intend to pass the cottage. When she had reached a certain point, she thought she would turn back, and walk the other way. But as she came within hail of the lighted windows, she glanced at them for one sight of Captain Philip. She expected to see him (as she had often done before) bent over his books by the lamplight, or ruminating in his arm-chair, with his pipe in his mouth. But when she had drawn sufficiently near to command the interior, she perceived the captain (to her amazement) stretched over the table in an attitude of despair, with his face hidden in his hands. In a moment Evelyn Rayne had forgotten her own trouble, and thought only of his. Hurrying on with noiseless footstep, and without reflecting that she might intrude upon a sacred sorrow, she stood upon

the threshold of the cottage door, and said softly, but in a voice of the deepest concern,—

"Captain Philip! Captain Philip! What *is* the matter?"

The overseer, whose thoughts had been far away in some cloudland of hopeless conjecture, started to his feet as he heard the words, and stared at the vision in his doorway. Then remembrance poured back upon him, and he realized *who* it was who had come like an angel to cheer his darkness, and glowed scarlet with the recognition.

"Miss Rayne!" he exclaimed; "what has brought you here? Do you require me? Won't you walk in?"

Evelyn had always a strong sense of the ridiculous ready to be roused in her.

"Do you think I *may* walk in," she answered, "without the whole parish scandalizing me to-morrow, Captain Philip? Well, I'll risk it, if only to learn what made me find you thus. Don't tell me you are in trouble too, for the air reeks with it," and she sunk down upon a chair in a despondent attitude as she spoke.

"If the air reeks with it," he said gently, "I cannot expect to miss my share, but I am sorry you caught me in a discontented mood, Miss Rayne. You may be sure I thought that I was quite alone."

"And I had no intention of disturbing your privacy, believe me. But why are you discontented, Captain Philip? Is it anything to do with Mount Eden?" she asked anxiously.

"Indeed, it has nothing to do with Mount Eden; and yet, as I sat here this evening, I was thinking whether I should not be wiser to ask you to look out for another overseer."

She turned pale in a moment.

"*Another overseer?* Then you wish to leave us—to—to—"

Her voice faltered. She could not proceed.

"Indeed, and *indeed* I do not," he replied earnestly; "I love Mount Eden and everything connected with it—in fact, I love it all so much, it tears my heart to think of parting, and yet, Miss Rayne—"

"I understand you," she said; "you have had the offer of a better situation—a position more fitted to your abilities and education; but if there is anything I can do to

induce you to remain—if I can increase your salary, or make you more comfortable, or—"

"Do not mention it, Miss Rayne. Your kind heart is leading you astray. I have had no such offer as you refer to. I want no more money than I receive. I am quite comfortable and happy here—"

"Then why do you want to leave us?"

"Because—because—there is such a thing as being *too* happy in a situation—of becoming so much at home that it is death to tear one's self away, and if the end comes, what then?" he said, in a low voice.

Evelyn was gazing up at him as he spoke, with eyes of entreaty.

"If that is all," she exclaimed, "don't leave me, for God's sake, for I am so unhappy."

And with that, she lowered her face in her hands, and burst into tears.

Captain Philip bent over her, and said hurriedly,—

"Don't do that, Miss Rayne, You torture me. I will *never* leave you if you do not wish it. I will live and die here if I can be of any service to you. If the thought of my going distresses you, dismiss it from your mind at once. I will remain if my own heart dies under the process."

But she was weeping so unrestrainedly that she did not notice his words.

"Will you not tell me, in your turn," he continued, "what is the reason of your grief? I have seen, for some time past, that you are far more unhappy than circumstances warranted you to be; and I strongly suspect that it is connected with the presence of Mr. and Mrs. Lyle at Mount Eden. Don't look so astonished. Do you think I have so little interest in you as not to notice the variation in your words and looks? You do me a great injustice if that is the case."

"I know that you have been always kind and good, Captain Philip, and I believe you to be a true friend. As I walked along to-night, I was longing to be able to confide my troubles to just such a friend as you could be."

"And is that impossible? Do not think me presumptuous, Miss Rayne, but if the counsel or assistance of a man can help you out of your difficulty, trust me without fear. I will respect your confidence as if it were my own. Has

this man been insulting you? Has he presumed, on your affection for his wife, to overstep the limits of your forbearance?"

"Something very like it," she said hesitatingly; "and you may suppose how unhappy it made me, for Agnes' sake. Oh, Captain Philip, I am afraid that will turn out a most unfortunate marriage. I would do anything to save my poor girl from the consequences of her imprudence, but Mr. Lyle will end by setting her against me also."

"You mean he has begun to do so?"

"I mean he has begun to do so," she repeated, relapsing into tears.

Captain Philip paced up and down the little room.

"Villain! scoundrel! coward!" he muttered. "And to what purpose? He only cuts his own throat by doing so. Miss Rayne," he continued, turning suddenly towards her, "you have honored me by calling me your friend. Let me prove myself to be so by speaking to you without reservation. You have known this man Lyle before. I guessed it the first time I saw you together. What is the secret between you? I know it can be nothing dishonoring to yourself, but it may be the means of ultimate injury to you. Why do you keep him at Mount Eden? Is it entirely for Mrs. Lyle's sake, or for his own?"

Evelyn looked up at him with an expression of alarm.

"How did you find it out? How much do you know?"

"Nothing but what I have told you, and that is only guess work. But I am certain there is more behind, and if it is turned into a means of annoyance to you, you should not keep it to yourself.

His hand was grasping the arm of her chair as he spoke, and she laid hers gently upon it. The contact thrilled him through and through.

"If I *dared* confide in you," she whispered, "you don't know how gladly I would share the burden which is becoming too heavy for me to bear alone. I am distracted with doubt and suspense. I cannot sleep for fear and anxiety, and I feel so completely and utterly *alone*. In all the wide word, I don't know one creature to whom I form the centre of existence."

"Yes, there *is* one, Evelyn, for whom you are the end and aim of everything, and that is *myself*," cried Captain Philip passionately. "Oh, forgive me if I am too pre-

sumptuous in saying this; but use me as you will, for I shall be your servant only to the last day of my life."

"You—*you*—" gasped Evelyn, with a face of crimson; "you care for me like *this*, Captain Philip?"

"I care for you like that—just like that. I would be content to die if I might only see you happy and at rest without me—content to live, even without hope, if my dying would cause you any pain."

"You love me like—like *that?*" she reiterated, as if the idea were too astonishing for her to grasp.

"Yes, I love you, Evelyn; and if to say it is to part us for ever, I *must* say it just this once. I have loved you from the first day we met. But don't imagine I have cherished any wild hopes concerning you. I know my love is hopeless."

"But *how* do you know it?" she interrupted him, with a tender smile.

Captain Philip sprung back as if he had been shot.

"My God! it is not possible," he exclaimed, "that you have conceived any interest in me? Speak, Evelyn, in mercy. Do not keep me in this miserable suspense."

She clasped his hand tighter, and drew him nearer to her chair.

"Don't go," she whispered. "Stay on and take care of Mount Eden and *of me.*"

CHAPTER XXIV.

PHILIP THE COMFORTER.

He sunk on his knees beside her, and threw his arms about her waist, and gazed in her glowing face for a few moments in silence, and then he said, in an agitated voice,—

"*Dear* woman,—so trusting, because you are yourself so worthy of all trust,—how can you say those sweet words to me, of whom you know nothing, except that I have been an honest and faithful steward."

"And is that *nothing?*"

"A great deal for Mount Eden, perhaps, but nothing, Evelyn, for *your husband.* I hold the position of your inferior—of one of the people. I may have risen from the gutter. How can you tell?"

"Since you *have* risen, that is all that concerns me. I think people make far too much fuss about the differences of birth and station. Besides, I am of no birth myself. My family were all merchants. That is only one grade above tradesmen in the social scale."

"But you are rich, dearest. You have Mount Eden. And I have nothing—I am a beggar."

"You have *me*," said Evelyn slyly; "and Mount Eden and I are one."

"But what will the world say to your marrying your overseer—your servant? Will it not be of opinion that you have lowered yourself by raising me?"

Evelyn laughed merrily at the idea.

"Of course it will, Captain Philip. When did the world ever say anything that was kind, or generous, or soothing to one's feeling? It would not be the world if it did. But surely you and I are above its petty malice—its sneers and its sarcasm. It is not happy itself, and it cannot bear to see others happy. But if you think that I can make you so"—she added timidly.

"*If I think!* Do I think," he exclaimed fervently, "that God is truth, or heaven happiness? It would be heaven to me to call you wife, Evelyn."

"Then you shall do so," she said quietly, and Captain Philip stooped over her and took her hands in his, and bent his head down till his mouth rested on her own, and they had exchanged their first kiss. Neither of them spoke for some minutes afterwards. They felt that their newly-confessed love had received its baptism.

"I have so little to tell you of myself," he said, when that long pause was broken, "except what you already know. My actual birth is not inferior to your own,—I can vouch for so much,—but my early life passed at sea laid the foundation of a rough-and-ready manhood. I need not tell you, my dearest, who have known me so intimately, that I am anything but a courtier. A rather sad and lonely boyhood soured me too soon, and a sea life threw me on my own resources for companionship. So I grew reserved and somewhat morose, and looked for friends only in my books and my pipe, until I met your own sweet self, and you changed earth into a paradise for me."

"What made you leave the sea?" asked Evelyn.

"It had always been an uncongenial life to me, although

I prospered in it. And then certain news concerning my family reached me from England, and I determined to return home and test the truth of it, and one thing grew from another, till I resolved to settle on land again, and applied for the vacant situation on Mount Eden. Do you remember the day I came down from London to see you, Evelyn, and the conversation we held in the library?"

"Quite well. I thought you very nice, though rather brusque, and I made you stay to dinner. And in the evening we rode over the estate together, and—"

"I fell in love with you."

"Not so soon as *that*, surely?"

"Quite as soon as that, I think. I thought you the most practical, sensible, clear-headed woman I had ever met in my life."

"Oh, that doesn't sound nice at all. Was that *all* you thought?"

"No, indeed. I thought a great deal more than I dare tell you, even now. If you think all my admiration of you is founded on your business qualities, you are very much mistaken. But you are a woman above the incense of flattery. You will not need to be *told* everything. You will see it for yourself, as you will read my love for you, darling, from day to day."

"And you mine," she murmured, with her hand in his.

"And now, dear Evelyn, since we have settled this happy matter (ah, how little I thought a few hours back, darling, that life would ever look so bright to me again!), won't you tell me what it is concerning this fellow Lyle that so distresses you? Is it in consequence of the rumors I told you of this afternoon? You are surely not so foolish as to believe it possible that your claim to these estates could ever be disputed. If you are, you may take *my* word for it that the man *lies*. Your footing here is as secure as if you had purchased the land with your own money."

Evelyn began to look perturbed again. The allusion to Jasper Lyle had revived her former doubts and fears—doubts and fears which she felt now that she was bound to communicate to the man she had accepted for her husband, and who would share her disappointment if she lost her fortune and estates.

"I quite forgot that, Captain Philip," she said, "and you should have heard it first. I ought not to have accepted

your offer until I had told you of the risk I run of having to resign Mount Eden."

"Let me hear it now, then," he replied with an amused smile; "it might make a serious change in my opinions."

"Ah, now you are laughing at me, but I am in earnest; were I not an independent woman, how could I be so selfish as to hamper you with the burden of my support—*you*, who live like an anchorite yourself?"

"Oh, we should do very well, depend upon it. Perhaps the new owner of Mount Eden (is it to be Mr. Jasper Lyle himself, by the way?) would retain my services as overseer, and let us live on in Bachelor's Hall. How would you like that, Evelyn? Only we should have to change its name, and call it Honeymoon Cot, or something equally appropriate."

His nonsense made her smile.

"I don't suppose there really *is* much risk," she answered, "but it is right that you should know all. But before I begin my story, will it hurt you very much to hear that you are not the first man to whom I have been engaged?"

"It would hurt me much more to think you kept back any portion of your life from me, Evelyn."

"It happened a long time ago," she said, slipping her hand in his—"when I was a girl of seventeen. You have heard me mention I had two cousins. I was engaged to the younger of the two, William Caryll."

"The one who went to America?"

"Yes, but I have never told you the reason he went there."

"I have heard it, my dear, from Mr. Gamble and others. He tried to embezzle by forging your uncle's name, but the cheques were stopped at the bank. And then William Caryll disappeared, and has never been heard of since."

"I helped him to escape justice, Captain Philip."

"*You* did! How?"

"He came back to me in his terror at hearing the police were on his track, and I hid him on the roof of the house for three days (the trap door to it opened from my bedroom), and at the end of that time I dyed his hair and dressed him in a suit of my clothes, and got him off to New York on board an emigrant ship."

"Where did he get the money for his passage?"

"I had a little money. I sold a few articles of jewellery and realized sufficient for his need."

"Oh, you plucky girl. And it was all for nothing. You have never heard from him again?"

"No, I never heard from him again," she echoed mournfully.

"I suppose he died out there, poor fellow."

"No, Captain Philip, he did not die. He is in England. He is Jasper Lyle," she said, in a low voice.

"Jasper Lyle! Good heavens!" cried Captain Philip, leaping from his seat; "William Caryll at Mount Eden—William Caryll the husband of Agnes Featherstone! and, Evelyn," in a tone of the deepest distress, "*do you love him still?*"

"Oh, no, no. What can you think of me to ask such a question—I, who have just plighted my troth to yourself? Captain Philip, I did not believe you could do me such an injustice."

"Forgive me, dearest. It was only a momentary, jealous fear. *Of course* you do not love him. But when did you find him out?"

"Directly I met him at the Featherstones. He has continued to dye his hair, and acquired a foreign accent, but I detected him through it all. I was very angry at first, Captain Philip. I rebuked him sharply for his infidelity to me, and threatened him with exposure. But when I came to reflect, I resolved, for Agnes' sake, to let the past bury itself."

"But how did he dare to show his face (disguised or not) in England? Are there no proofs of his criminality? What became of the forged cheques?"

"*I* hold them—no, I mean I *held* them, and when I met Will Caryll, I showed them to him in proof of my assertion."

"And then you destroyed them, I suppose? That would be just like you."

"For once you are wrong, Captain Philip. I did not destroy them, but—he has stolen them from me."

"*Stolen them!* Is it possible?"

"It is the fact. I *know* they were in my possession when Will and his wife came to live at Mount Eden, for I had been looking at them but a few days before, and my keys are always put away in my wardrobe. My cousin must have abstracted those keys and rifled the cabinet. Then he considerd himself safe. Don't you see, Captain Philip,

that all these rumors he has spread about Mount Eden refer to himself? *He* is the claimant who is about to spring up and dispute my legal ownership of my property."

"Impossible, impossible!" repeated Captain Philip. "He could not be such a fool. Why, if the forgeries had never been retained, do you suppose there are not a dozen members of your uncle's firm ready to swear to his identity as the forger—Mr. Gamble among the number, who hates William Caryll like poison."

"But it is so far possible," asserted Evelyn, "that he has dared to threaten me with it only this afternoon. He has grown so bold that he has disclosed his identity to Agnes, and made her believe he is the rightful owner of Mount Eden, and I am an impostor, keeping him out of his estate. He has told her worse things than that," she continued, in a faltering voice; "he has insulted me and my past love for him, by declaring that it still exists, and that I asked them here only that I might have had the opportunity of gratifying it."

"I'll soon put a stop to that," cried Captain Philip, with clenched teeth; "I'll see if the brute dares to insult you again. And this, Evelyn, *is the man you loved!*"

"This is the man I *thought* I loved, Captain Philip, but as soon as I met him again my liking faded like a dream. It was my belief in him that I loved—not Will Caryll. He is not worth the love of any honest woman. How I wish my poor Agnes had never met him."

"Mrs. Lyle will not suffer under the infliction as you would have done, Evelyn. Thank God that you were reserved for me, all unworthy of you as I am. But I think you will agree with me that your cousin must at once leave Mount Eden. After what has happened, he should not be suffered to pollute your presence for another day."

"But I'm afraid he will refuse to go. He spoke this afternoon as if he had every right to remain—as if he *dared* me to turn him out."

"We will soon see about that. Evelyn, will you trust this matter to your future husband? Will you let me act for you, and bring this insolent pretender to his bearings?"

"Yes, Captain Philip; I put it all into your hands. Do as you think best. Only remember how dear Agnes is to

me, and that, for the sake of the past, I have no wish to revenge myself upon her husband."

"I will respect your wishes to the smallest particular, and observe the utmost secrecy with regard to what you have told me. But William Caryll can only be effectually convinced of the impudence of his pretensions through a legal opinion, therefore you must let me confide the case to a solicitor. Shall it be yours—or mine?"

"Have you a solicitor?" she asked innocently.

"I have. One who knows me well, and has been such a friend to me for years that I shall lose no time in introducing him to you. I will run up to town and see him the first thing in the morning—that is, if I can be spared."

"No, you can't be spared," she said affectionately.

He pressed her closely to him as he answered,—

"You cannot think how my blood boils to think of the outrage to which your feelings have been subjected, nor how I long to chastise the offender. But you loved him once, Evelyn, and so we will deal as leniently with him as we can."

"We can afford to do it," she said, "because we are so happy."

"*Are* you happy?"

"So much so, that I don't believe I ever knew the meaning of the word until this evening. But it is growing late. It is past nine o'clock, Captain Philip, you must let me go."

"Not until you call me something better than Captain Philip," he answered, as they passed out into the night, and stood in the shadow of the cottage eaves together.

He was holding her in his arms, and she turned her head and laid her soft cheek against his own.

"Love, let me go," she whispered, and then he loosed his hold reluctantly, and watched her figure flitting through the semi-darkness till it was lost to view.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE OWNER OF MOUNT EDEN.

WHEN Jasper Lyle saw his Cousin Evelyn fly from his wife's caress and his own presence, and heard the unmistakable anguish with which she exclaimed, "Don't touch me! Don't speak to me! for I feel as if I was going mad," he smiled with inward satisfaction, and thought that the game was won.

He mistook her horror at his ingratitude for fear, her pain at Agnes' unexpected accusation, for sorrow at the idea of losing her property. He had no more power of gauging the depths of her affections or feelings now, than he had had in the days gone by.

All the women from whom he had gathered his experience of the sex put together, had not possessed one-half the love or virtue of the woman he had deserted and tried to injure. But his selfish, shallow nature was unable to appreciate it. As he had been blind to the greatness of her heart, and the amount of the sacrifices she had made for him in the days of their youth, so was her nature a sealed book to him in the present. Even Agnes, with her small mind, understood it better than he did.

She was awed by Evelyn's sudden departure and agonized cry. It sounded like a wail of despair to her—like the last farewell of some poor soul bent on self-destruction, and she crept up to her husband's side with a face full of fear, and said,—

"Oh, Jasper, what will she do to herself? Hadn't you better go after her and bring her back again? Suppose—suppose, she should *really* be going mad?"

Mr. Lyle laughed at his wife's simplicity.

"I should rather think she *is*, my dear—mad as the hare of March. The prospect of losing Mount Eden is enough to drive any one out of their senses. But don't you see, Agnes, that the way in which Evelyn has taken the news only proves that I am right? The non-production of

those blessed proofs clears every obstacle from my path. She sees it for herself."

"But, Jasper," said Agnes timidly, "you didn't really take them—did you?"

Mr. Lyle's indignation was sublime to witness.

"I am surprised at your asking such a question, Agnes. You must be aware that no gentleman would be capable of doing such a thing. I very much doubt if the forged cheques were ever in her possession."

"But Evelyn seemed so sure of it."

"It was her policy to seem sure. When she saw that my suspicions had been roused with regard to the legality of her claims, she had no resource but to brave it out. Do you suppose that, if she had thought me in the wrong, she would have given way to that burst of temper and run off in that extraordinary fashion. She is a very clever woman, mind you, and has not been in possession of Mount Eden for ten years without ascertaining the exact grounds on which she holds her property. I heard that fellow Philip say, the other day, that her solicitor declares she is almost as good a lawyer as himself. Had she been sure that I could, by no possibility, dispute the possession of Mount Eden with her, she would have done battle to the end. Her rapid disappearance off the field has pleased me more than anything else could have done. We are all right now, little woman, and I shall see you the mistress of Mount Eden before many months are over your head."

But Agnes seemed anything but "all right." The influence of the old days was upon her again, the remembrance of Evelyn's love was overbalancing every other consideration, and she hated herself for the words she had said, for the wicked accusation she had made against her dearest friend. That Jasper had asserted it was true was nothing to her now. Even if it *were* true, she was ready to forgive it. She felt in this extremity that what she wanted, above all other things, was the assurance of Evelyn's affection.

Oh, Jasper, please don't speak of it. If it ever comes to pass (which I hope it never will), it will only make me still more miserable than I am. I told you so before. How could I bear to take *her* place,—my darling Evelyn,—and reign in her stead. It would be impossible. Nothing should make me consent to it."

Jasper Lyle regarded his wife with looks of astonishment, mingled with contempt.

"Here's a pretty thing," he exclaimed. "After having been the most unlucky devil in the world for the last ten years, my fortune seems about to change, and my wife (the woman who will benefit by it most) is the one to turn round and say she wouldn't accept it. Why, you must be mad. Right is right, and if it's my right to own Mount Eden, you ought to rejoice at it. Hasn't Eve enjoyed it for ten years? Isn't it fair I should have my turn? And now you want to pose as a martyr instead of going down on your knees and thanking God He ever put it into my head to marry you. Pshaw, it is positively sickening."

But Agnes seemed quite indifferent to his sarcasm.

"If this really comes to pass," she pleaded, "wouldn't it be possible to share the money and estate with Evelyn —that we should have half, and she half? It seems so hard that, when she has considered it her own for so many years, and taken such trouble to improve it, she should be called upon to give it *all* up. Half is more than we have ever expected to get, Jasper. Surely we can do so much."

"No such thing," he responded angrily. "If the place is mine, it's mine altogether. Indeed, I am not sure that I couldn't call upon my cousin to refund what she has spent during her period of possession. I have heard of such things. At any rate, I am sure I could claim the interest."

Agnes' blue eyes dilated with dismay.

"But I thought Evelyn and you had agreed that whichever inherited Mount Eden was to share it with the other? Didn't you tell me so yesterday, when I said it was generous of her to let us live here?"

Lyle looked awkwardly conscious.

"Well, yes," he answered, "there *was* an agreement of that sort between us, *in case* we married each other. I think Eve was the one to propose it. I fancy she wanted to bind me down to marry her. But you see I didn't, and so it becomes null and void. Don't look so crestfallen, Agnes. I'm not going to turn my cousin out to starve, if that is what you imagine. I should make her an allowance, of course, and she could go and live with your mother, or—"

"Oh, couldn't she live with *us*," interrupted Agnes,

"and let everything go on as it has done? Mount Eden wouldn't seem the same place without Evelyn; in fact, all the pleasure of my life would go with her."

"That's not very complimentary to *me*, I must say," replied her husband; "however, don't cry about it, for nothing's settled yet, remember. I'm rather sorry, now I come to think of it, Agnes, that I showed my hand so openly to Eve to-night, because it is sure to lead to unpleasantness between us; and if the case is a long time settling (as these disputed will cases generally are), it may be awkward our remaining here during its progression. However, there's one thing to be said for it. If I have a good case, I shall find no difficulty in raising money and we can go abroad whilst it is pending, and enjoy ourselves a great deal more than we can do whilst I have to work like a laborer on the estate."

But no prospect seemed fair in Agnes' eyes.

"How I wish you had never mentioned anything about it," she said, with a heavy sigh; "and still more, that I had kept silence on the subject. Will Evelyn ever forgive me, I wonder? And the worst of it is, that I don't believe it. I only said it out of temper. If Evelyn has shown you attention since we came here, it has only been out of kindness. I am sure she would never be so false to me as to make love to my husband."

"Very well, have it your own way," replied Jasper carelessly. "You appear to me to be all on the opposite side, but understand me plainly, Agnes, your feelings will never stand in the way of my getting my rights. But there is no need for you to plead Evelyn's cause in this ridiculous fashion to me. It is not likely I should ever let my own cousin want the necessaries of life; indeed, I am not at all sure that I should not keep her at Mount Eden. But it's a great deal too soon to discuss the advisability of such a scheme. Most likely Eve will marry, and have a home of her own. I fancy she would have done so long ago if it hadn't been for my unworthy self. And now, as my lady does not seem inclined to honor us with her company again this evening, I think we had better retire to our own room."

"I wonder where she is, and what she is doing," said Agnes, as she walked to the window, and gazed out upon the night. "It is so dark, Jasper, and so chilly, and she had nothing over her head or shoulders."

"How can you tell? She most likely picked up a wrap in the hall. Eve is used to take these late rambles about the park. I have met her out as late as ten o'clock."

"How shall we meet her to-morrow? What will she say to us?" murmured Agnes.

"Nothing at all, if she is a wise woman," replied Jasper; "but if there is any renewal of the discussion, I shall go over to St. Mary Ottery at once, and see Dickson on the subject. Otherwise, there is no hurry about the matter, and next week, when I go to town, will do."

"Oh, put it off a little while, Jasper, darling," said Agnes coaxingly, as she hung about her husband; "there is so little happiness in this world. Don't disturb it until it is absolutely necessary."

"All right, little one; but it must depend upon the way Eve takes it," returned Lyle, who, like most shallow-pated people, was absurdly sanguine of success in everything, and seemed to make quite sure that Mount Eden would eventually be his own.

He spent the remainder of the evening in his wife's room, telling her how he should alter this, and build up that, and improve the other, when the estate came into his hands, and especially how the very first thing he should do would be to kick the overseer out of the place.

"I hate that brute Philip," he said, "and have done so from the beginning. I believe he has what they call in Italy 'the evil eye.' He always looks as if he suspected one of being a thief, or a murderer, or something. I can't understand what makes Eve think so much of the cad. She trusts everything in his hands as if it were his own. She can't have got up a flirtation with her overseer, eh, Agnes? What a lark if she had! It would greatly simplify matters for us, though, for there would be no question then of either of them staying at Mount Eden. Don't you agree with me, dear?"

But poor little tired-out Agnes was past agreeing with anybody. She had wept till her eyes were inflamed, and her head ached, and was still catching her breath, as she lay on her pillow, like a child that has sobbed itself to sleep. So, after another cigar or two, Jasper Lyle thought fit to follow her example. Both husband and wife felt rather sheepish as they descended to the breakfast-table the following morning. Agnes (who had never met Eve-

lyn yet without a hearty embrace) hardly knew whether she dared approach her, and was agreeably surprised when her friend came forward and saluted her just as usual, and spoke in a cheerful voice, as if nothing had happened between them. She was a little cool to Jasper, it is true, but still it was nothing remarkable; and as the meal proceeded, both the Lyles regarded her with furtive amazement, for Evelyn was not only cheerful—she was positively radiant—although, with her native kind-heartedness, her spirits were occasionally toned down by the thought of the disappointment in store for her companions. For Captain Philip had assured her that her position was safe, and she knew he would not have said so without good cause.

Agnes glanced up at her timidly every now and then, until she began to question if the scene of the night before had not been a horrid dream. She thought Evelyn looked younger and handsomer than she had ever seen her do before. Her soft cheeks were tinged with pink—her eyes were deep and glowing—in everything she did was a kind of fluttering joy, as if she were not quite certain herself if it were real or assumed.

"Will you drive this morning, Agnes?" she inquired, as they rose from table.

"Yes—if you are going," replied Agnes, overcome by her kindness.

"I am not going to-day, my dear, but that need make no difference to you. I have some important matters to arrange and think over, and I wish to be alone. Will you go?"

Agnes longed to tell her what was in her heart, and to implore her forgiveness for what had occurred; but, with all Evelyn's courtesy, there was the slightest infusion of formality that made the words die upon Mrs. Lyle's tongue, whilst she stammered out an affirmative instead.

"And for myself, Miss Rayne, I suppose I had better beat up the stackers at the Lower Farm?" said Jasper, with an assumption of being completely at his ease.

"As you please, Mr. Lyle," replied Evelyn gravely, and then she returned to Agnes. "I suppose I had better tell you that there will be a couple of gentlemen to dinner this evening, as you may like to make a little difference in your toilet."

At another time Agnes would have been all eagerness to

learn the names of the expected guests, and where they were coming from, but her heart seemed to have died in her to-day, and she turned away without putting a single inquiry on the subject. Both she and Jasper felt as if they had been crushed, and yet Evelyn had not said one unkind or reproachful word to either of them. But something in her manner seemed to have put an extinguisher over all their hopes, and, though they did not see her again until they met at the dinner-table, the feeling with which she had inspired them lasted all day.

Meanwhile Evelyn sat alone, ruminating on her great and unexpected happiness. She felt that she wanted hours of solitude and thought to make herself familiar with it. And yet, when she came to think of it, *was* it so unexpected? Surely the love which she felt for the man to whom she had betrothed herself could not have sprung up in a few days. Looking back, with eyes from which the veil had fallen, she could see now the pleasure she had taken in Captain Philip's society from the beginning of their acquaintance—the entire confidence she had had in his counsel and advice, the admiration she had felt for his goodness and truth, and the many manly qualities which combined to make him what he was—and recognize that it was more than liking that she had entertained for him.

Yet, had Will Caryll never returned to convince her of his faithlessness,—had he remained in America, silent but unforgotten,—Evelyn might have gone on for a lifetime believing in her own fidelity to an ideal that had never existed but in her imagination. But now her self-deception was entirely swept away, and though, for the sake of the past, she desired to be lenient to her cousin, there was no one she more thoroughly despised for his worthless and contemptible character.

She had but one regret concerning him—that her dear Agnes should have been ensnared by his plausible conversation and successful imposture. But that was irremediable, and all Evelyn could do was to make her future as bearable to her as she could.

A dozen schemes to this end passed through her brain for the benefit of these two who had joined issue to insult and wound her, but she would decide on none till Captain Philip had returned to approve her choice. How sweet it seemed to the lonely woman to think that she had given

the right to some one to direct her actions for the future. The warm blood rushed to her face as she remembered what had passed between them the night before, and changed the current of her whole life.

Captain Philip had started for London by the first train that morning to see his solicitor, Mr. Greville, and had promised to bring him back to Mount Eden in time for dinner. He was not a man to let the grass grow under his feet. Once convinced that Jasper Lyle was persecuting Evelyn Rayne, and he would not let him stay under her roof one hour longer than was necessary. To think that any one should presume to speak slightingly of or to the woman for whom *he* would consider it too little to lay down his life, had stung Philip's brave heart to the quick. Evelyn was brave, too, but he knew well how much of a woman's love of protection lay beneath that bravery. He had watched the anxious eyes droop, and the sweet lips quiver, and the whole face grow fearful and discomposed when some difficulty presented itself with which a woman's moral strength was hardly fit to cope, and he had longed at such moments to fold her in his arms, and promise to shield her from all annoyances in the future. And now he had won the right to share her troubles and battle with her difficulties, and his heart was dancing with irrepressible gladness as he journeyed to London in her cause, and hers was glowing with satisfied content at home. Nothing could ever seem hard, or a subject for anxiety to her again, for *he* would be by her side to relieve her of all trouble, and take the burden on his own shoulders. She felt almost as shy as a girl of eighteen as she dressed herself that afternoon to meet her lover and his friend. Yet something in her nature made her shrink from making an alteration in her usual dinner dress of black cashmere, lest he should think that she imagined that her appearance could make any difference in her to his eyes. So she descended to her drawing-room a little before the usual time, looking just as she did every day, excepting for some extra color in her glowing face, and a bunch of Malmaison carnations at her breast.

The travelers were very punctual. She had sent the carriage to meet them at St. Mary Ottery, and before she had been down three minutes, they were in the room beside her, Captain Philip grasping her hands with a pressure that

said, "You are mine!—you are *mine!*" whilst he strove coherently to introduce the white-haired stranger who accompanied him as his "best friend, Mr. Greville." Mr. Greville regarded his blushing hostess with greater earnestness than is usually accorded on a first introduction, and it made her blush the more.

"Forgive me, my dear young lady," he said, as he observed her embarrassment, "if I gaze at your features with more interest than is consistent with our slight acquaintanceship. But I have heard so much and so often of Miss Rayne of Mount Eden, from this boy here," laying his hand on Philip's shoulder, "that I feel as if I already were your friend. Will you be vexed if I say that he has told me *everything*, and that I have come down prepared to offer you both my heartiest congratulations?"

"Thank you," she said softly; "we feel that they are due."

"More so than you think for now, Miss Rayne. I have known Philip ever since he was in knickerbockers; I have watched his career during the period he has served at Mount Eden, and he is worthy of your highest esteem. I can say no more."

"And that is too much, Mr. Greville," cried Captain Philip laughing. "Hold hard, do! You are making *me* blush now."

"Well, I will say no more at present, but before Miss Rayne wishes me good-night, she will acknowledge I have said less than the truth."

But here the conversation was interrupted by the entrance of Mr. and Mrs. Lyle, further introductions were gone through, Jasper scowled when he saw that the overseer was to be one of the dinner guests, and his manner towards that gentleman was hardly civil, but Captain Philip took no notice of it. Evelyn perceived, from the keen glance which he threw at her cousin, that Mr. Greville had been made acquainted with the family history, and she wondered what decision he and her future husband had arrived at concerning Jasper, and what measures they intended to take with regard to him. But she made up her mind that she must possess her soul in patience until the morning. Dinner was on the table. This was no time for business, and, indeed, she felt glad to think that poor Jasper would have a few hours' respite. The disappointment would be hard

enough for him when it came. Meanwhile, she would be happy. She could not fail to be so. She had got her handsome lover back again, sitting next to her at the table, and she need trouble her head about nothing further. The matter was off her hands. Had he not said he would settle it all for her? They were a merry party that evening, notwithstanding that Mr. Lyle felt himself lowered by sitting down to dinner with the overseer. Mr. Greville proved to be a most agreeable and talkative companion. Captain Philip was brimming over with happiness, Evelyn was softly and genuinely content, and poor little penitent Agnes, seeing her friend's evident pleasure, took heart of grace to believe herself forgiven, and looked pleased as well. They were dining in the same room in which Vernon and Captain Philip had once sat with Evelyn, and which held so many portraits of her dead Cousin Hugh. The little lawyer seemed very inquisitive upon the subject, and would have the history of each separate picture in turn.

"A fine, handsome boy, evidently," he observed; "what a pity he was lost—what an affliction for his parents, and yet, had he survived, you wouldn't be sitting at the head of the table at this moment, Miss Rayne, and dispensing your hospitalities in such a graceful manner. I wonder what you would say if the door were to open at this moment and Cousin Hugh walk in to claim his own?"

At this question Jasper Lyle smiled sarcastically, as much as to say, "Her fortitude may be put to a similar test before long;" and Captain Philip gazed eagerly in Evelyn's face, as though he would read there if she valued her property above himself.

"What should I say, Mr. Greville?" she answered smiling; "I should welcome him back with all the warmth of which I am capable, for the sake of his dear father, who was so good to me. I have often said (haven't I, Captain Philip?) that I should never be surprised to see Cousin Hugh turn up again."

"You have, indeed; and I have often replied that I couldn't imagine how a sensible woman could entertain such an absurd idea."

"But all your protestations have not knocked it out of my head," she answered merrily.

"Yet I'm afraid it would be the cause of serious annoyance to you, Miss Rayne, all the same," persisted Mr.

Greville. "Cousin Hugh's company would hardly prove a compensation for the loss of Mount Eden."

"Well, I don't mean to say that I shouldn't feel it a little —for other people's sake as well as my own, Mr. Greville," said Evelyn with a heightened color; "still, I am so happy in other ways that I don't think I should grieve long. I am a bit of a philosopher, as perhaps Captain Philip has told you."

"I am glad to hear that you are, Miss Rayne, for (do you know) I came down here to-day to put your philosophy to the test."

"Indeed!" she said, with an incredulous smile.

"Yes, and I would have you prepare yourself for a shock. I am an old and intimate friend of the Caryll family. I knew your late uncle and his wife well, and stood godfather to their only son, and I have received credible information, Miss Rayne, that your Cousin Hugh is actually alive, and about to lay a claim to his father's property."

"I don't believe it!" exclaimed Jasper Lyle, springing to his feet with an oath.

"You may not believe my statement, sir," said Mr. Greville, turning to him, "but that doesn't excuse your want of manners at the dinner-table; besides, the matter concerns Miss Rayne, and not yourself."

Everybody else had anxiously turned towards the mistress of Mount Eden. She had grown very pale, and her lips twitched nervously, but the first trembling words she uttered, as she laid her hand on that of Captain Philip, were, "I shall not mind, if you still care for me."

"Bravo!" cried Mr. Greville, jumping to his feet. "My dear young lady, forgive me for breaking the news to you so lamely, but your Cousin Hugh has really returned to England, and to prove my words, *there* he sits by your side at the present moment, in the person of your overseer, Captain Philip."

Evelyn turned suddenly to Philip, who was gazing at her with all his eyes. She could not speak. The revulsion of feeling was too great for her. But she grew as crimson as she had been white before, and her hand grasped his like a vice.

"*Cousin Hugh!*" at last she murmured incredulously.

"Yes, darling, your Cousin Hugh. You won't love me the less for that, will you, Evelyn?"

"But how—when—I cannot understand," she faltered, in a low voice.

"Let me explain for him," said Mr. Greville. "When Hugh was picked up after that accident at Callao by a Spanish vessel, he did not care to let his father know that he was alive. He never intended to return home again, and he was afraid of being fetched home if he disclosed his whereabouts. So he went on serving in the merchant service until the news reached him accidentally that Mr. Caryll was dead, and had left the estate behind him. Then Hugh came home to me, and proved his identity, and I told him how the land lay, and that Mount Eden (in default of his existence) was in the hands of one of his cousins. He meant to put in his claim for it, but he thought he'd come down first and have a look about him; and after that I heard no more of his pretensions, nor would he let me mention his name."

"How could I have had the heart to turn *you* out, Evelyn?" said Captain Philip. "Besides, I was very soon presumptuous enough to conceive a hope that some day you might take me in instead."

"And you are my Cousin Hugh?" said Evelyn wonderingly. "How strange it seems. I shall have to begin to know you all over again."

"I am your cousin, Hugh Philip Caryll, Evelyn, and sometimes I have wondered that you did not guess it; we have seemed, whilst talking, to sail so very close to the wind."

"Oh, no. It never crossed my mind, although we so often spoke of him. How should it, when I believed that he was dead? But now I know what it is that has always made your face seem half familiar to me—perhaps too, what has made my Cousin Hugh come to me so often in my dreams. Oh, how happy poor uncle would have been to see this day."

"And so Mount Eden will not change hands after all," exclaimed Mr. Greville gleefully. "A charming arrangement, Mr. Lyle, is it not, sir?"

"Oh, charming, charming!" replied Jasper Lyle, who was glaring with dismay at the sudden disappearance of all his prospects; "nothing could be more so, and, from what I hear and see, I conclude I am to congratulate Miss Rayne on her engagement to her cousin?"

"Exactly so," said Hugh Caryll; "but Miss Rayne had

already engaged herself to marry her overseer, Captain Philip."

"Oh, Evelyn, Evelyn, can you forgive me?" sobbed Agnes, on the other side. "I am so glad for you, darling, and so miserable for myself."

Evelyn turned at once to fold the weeping girl in her arms.

"My own dear sister," she whispered, "there is nothing to forgive. They were not your own words. I felt that as soon as they were uttered; and when you cease to believe them, they cease to pain me."

. . . . . .

"Hugh," she said that evening, as they sat together, holding sweet converse in her private room, "there is only one drop of bitter in my cup to-night, and that is the prospect of parting with Agnes. If she goes with Will to Italy, shall I ever see her again?"

"I don't see why you shouldn't, my darling, just as often as you please. Italy is not at the other end of the world, neither shall we be tied to one spot. What obstacle will there be to your visiting one another? Greville and I have been talking the matter over to-day, Evelyn, and what I propose is, that we should settle five hundred a year on Mrs. Lyle, to revert to her husband at her death if he survives her. This income will be sufficient to keep them very comfortably in the land of his adoption; and honestly, Evelyn, I believe they will be happier in Italy than in England. Will is a lazy, indolent fellow, who will prefer to lounge his life away, and after a while, when this unpleasantness has blown over, I daresay we shall all be able to meet on friendly terms."

"Oh, Hugh, how good you are. Not one man in a thousand would forgive the slights he has put upon you as you do."

"My dearest, you forget he is *my* cousin as well as yours, and it is our duty to do something for him. There is one comfort—his wife loves him whatever he is, and so they can neither of them be quite unhappy."

Evelyn moved a little closer to her lover.

"No; not whilst they have love," she murmured. "Love is the greatest happiness in all the world."

"In all the world," he repeated, as he pressed her closely to his heart.

THE END.

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